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**Civilian victimisation in the Tajik civil war  
how the popular front won the war and ruined the nation**

Mitchell, Jennifer

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**CIVILIAN VICTIMISATION IN THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR:  
HOW THE POPULAR FRONT WON THE WAR  
AND RUINED THE NATION**

by  
Jennifer Mitchell

*Dissertation Submitted in Accordance with the Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

King's College London  
Department of War Studies  
January 2014

## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates the question of why non-state armed forces target civilians, given the normative taboos against killing noncombatants and the potential for counterproductive strategic outcomes. It also analyses the effects of civilian victimisation on short-term conflict dynamics and long-term state security. Utilising the *strategic approach*, it constructs an original model of targeting incentives and strategic outcomes, and applies this analytical framework to the Tajik civil war and its victor, the Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT). Its central findings from the case study are: 1) The PFT victimised civilians primarily via targeted violence, displacement and criminality; 2) PFT victimisation of civilians was a rationalist strategy given that the normative, strategic and criminal incentives for victimisation were strong and the corresponding incentives for restraint were weak; 3) Civilian victimisation led to successful conflict outcomes for the PFT; 4) Civilian victimisation led to negative long-term strategic effects for the Tajik state, but with one significant positive effect in the form of postwar popular rejection of the renewal of conflict. This analysis leads to additional findings for the study of civilian victimisation in conflict: 1) It is analytically possible and advantageous to include criminality within categories of victimisation; 2) A multivariate incentives model provides a rigorous appraisal of non-state-actor targeting behaviour in war; 3) Victimisation can produce successful strategic outcomes for non-state armed forces; 4) The long-term strategic effects of victimisation can and should be evaluated within individual case studies of civilian victimisation.

## **Declaration**

The copyright of this dissertation rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

*This dissertation is dedicated to Stephane*

*Thank you for taking this journey with me,  
And reminding me of all that is good in this world*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Dr. Peter Neumann, for his generous and patient supervision of my doctoral research. His unsparing assessments and incisive guidance were critical to the completion of this dissertation, and I am particularly grateful for his good humour and encouragement throughout my postgraduate efforts. I would also like to thank Dr. David Betz for his generous provision of advice, encouragement and research opportunities, all of which have inspired and informed this dissertation. He has taught me not just about war, but how to think about war, and I've greatly enjoyed and appreciated our conversations and collaborations over the years.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Neil MacFarlane and Dr. Antonio Giustozzi for serving as my dissertation examiners, and for taking such considerable time to review and comment upon my research. Their insightful critiques helped me sharpen my arguments and clarify several important points, and their discussion has been of immense value in helping me formulate plans for future research. I thank them for making my viva a pleasurable, if necessarily challenging, intellectual endeavour.

The War Studies Department has been a collegial and supportive home for my academic pursuits, and I am very grateful to its staff and scholars for providing an environment rich in ideas and achievement. I am particularly grateful to Dr. James Gow and Dr. Steve Weiss, who taught me much about 'the experience of war' and how to teach the most difficult of topics in moving and ingenious ways.

I would like to thank King's College London for the financial support of my fieldwork in Central Asia, and express deep gratitude to those who assisted my research in the region. I would especially like to thank Bokhtar Bakozade, Elizabeth Dvorak Little and William Lawrence for going to such great lengths to facilitate my research and for being such congenial and helpful hosts.

It is safe to say that I could not have completed this dissertation without the advice and support of my extended family of War Studies friends. I am deeply grateful to Monica and Keir Allen, Jules Bastrup, Sara Fazlali, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Tim Stevens, Stephen Tankel and Luca Tardelli: they have inspired me, reassured me, made me think, made me laugh, and restored my faith in humanity many times over. I would particularly like to thank Thomas Hansen and Tom Hill, for being such brilliant 'partners in crime', and Daniel Bennett, for being such a generous collaborator and friend. Finally, I must thank Tim Sweijts for the

encouragement, the arguments, the long walks, and the intellectual honesty, all of which have made me not only a better academic but a better person.

I would also like to thank my dear friends in Washington and London who encouraged me to embark on this adventure and patiently endured my toils and troubles: Joy Atherton, Lillian Hueber, Ed Lockett, Barak Mendelsohn, Muraguri Murungi, Michaela Poppe and Ranka Tupek. I am truly blessed to have such generous, clever and funny people in my life, and I could not have sustained this project for so long without their support.

Finally, I would like to thank my family – Linda, George, Greg, Barbara, Anna and Alain – who have supported me intellectually, materially and emotionally throughout this endeavour. Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Stephane, for so many things: for going to Dushanbe; for maintaining calm during the documents/detergent fiasco; for giving me time and sacrificing so much of his own. This dissertation is a tribute to his love and support, for which I am ever grateful.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Nothing exposes the gaping disconnect between the theory of war and the practice of war as much as the killing of civilians. Historically, ‘just war’ and other cultural traditions have proscribed the targeting of noncombatants, and in the post-1945 era these normative considerations have become increasingly embedded in international legal regimes and national military doctrines. Targeting civilians is also conventionally seen as strategically counterproductive, as it may strengthen an opponent’s resistance whilst not sufficiently detracting from its military capabilities. In theory, then, civilian deaths in warfare should remain minimal.

In practice, civilians are routinely killed in large numbers. It is estimated that in the past three centuries the proportion of civilian deaths in warfare has averaged from 50 to 64 percent; in the twentieth century alone this totalled 50 million civilian deaths.<sup>1</sup> Civilians suffer even more disproportionately in civil wars, where a staggering 69 percent of deaths are noncombatants.<sup>2</sup> In short, normative values and strategic theory provide rather flimsy protection for civilians caught in the terrible reality of modern war.

The prevalence of civilian victimisation in contemporary warfare is often attributed to an increase in frequency of these particularly brutal intrastate wars, in which non-state forces that lie outside the boundaries of international law and state-based norms utilise strategies of civilian victimisation rather than direct military engagement.<sup>3</sup> Explanations such as these may be generally insightful, but for the most part they fail to account for *why* non-state forces engage in behaviour that is not only strategically risky but in opposition to nearly universal norms.

This dissertation grapples directly with this question, whilst also examining the strategic effects of this particular aspect of non-state-actor behaviour. In contrast to the common characterisation of civilian victimisation as irrational and purposeless violence, this dissertation focuses on the *instrumentality* of targeting civilians in warfare – in other words, the deliberate

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates from Eckhardt (1989), 89-98.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The oft-quoted claim that 90 per cent of civil war deaths are non-combatants has been largely debunked; see Center on International Cooperation (2011), 28.

<sup>3</sup> This argument is well summarised and critiqued in Newman (2004). On the association of barbarism with civil war, see Kalyvas (2006), 52-55.

use of violence against civilians as a means of achieving political and strategic objectives. It argues that non-state forces face an array of normative, strategic and criminal incentives to engage in either civilian victimisation or restraint, and may vacillate between them within a given conflict. Their choice of targeting has definitive strategic consequences, most immediately within the dynamics of the conflict itself but also within the long-term strategic landscape of a post-conflict state.

This dissertation applies an analytical framework known as the *strategic approach* to civilian victimisation and its consequences, by examining the links between an actor's incentives, its strategic choices, and the outcomes it experiences. In doing so, it departs from other models of conflict analysis in two ways. First, it adopts a timeframe that extends well beyond the cessation of hostilities: the outcomes under examination include not only the short-term results of war-fighting but the long-term consequences for security and stability of the state. Second, it argues that the common distinction between 'political' and 'criminal' non-state forces is analytically suspect and serves to obscure the totality of civilian victimisation in a given conflict. Political and criminal violence usually operate synergistically in conflict scenarios and there are distinct advantages to considering the multiple aims and levels of behaviour of a particular armed group.

These theoretical arguments and assumptions are brought to life via an in-depth examination of the Tajik civil war and the victimisation of civilians by the Popular Front of Tajikistan. Using the strategic approach, this dissertation seeks to answer one central research question: how and why did the Popular Front of Tajikistan engage in civilian victimisation, and what were the strategic effects in the near and long term? By providing an analytically rigorous answer to this question, this dissertation enhances our understanding and analysis of the Tajik civil war and suggests possible new avenues of research into the perplexing dynamics of modern civilian victimisation.

This dissertation therefore contributes to strategic studies generally (and the literature on intrastate conflict dynamics specifically) by providing a case study of a little-examined conflict actor and suggesting a framework for evaluating the drivers and effects of civilian victimisation in the short and long term. By engaging with literature and evidence from across the fields of strategic studies, the political economy of conflict, and constructivist analysis, it offers a new way of investigating the vexing question of why war-fighting forces target civilians and the full range of strategic effects that may be expected. The case study also contributes to the field empirically by providing a significantly expanded strategic history of the Tajik civil war. Finally,

by demonstrating how a set of criminal warlords became the most powerful political and strategic actors in the nation – largely due to a strategy of civilian victimisation – this dissertation challenges several important assumptions regarding the utility of targeting civilians and the capabilities and motivations of criminal actors.

In this introductory chapter, I present the Tajik case study's rationale and scope of inquiry, followed by an in-depth explanation of the dissertation's research methodology and structure. I conclude with a review of the relevant literature across several fields of study.

## **1.1 Case Study Summary and Rationale: The Tajik Civil War and the Popular Front of Tajikistan**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s provoked widespread speculation that a host of conflicts would erupt within its fragile and unstable successor states. In Central Asia this alarm proved to be unwarranted, except in one instance: Tajikistan, which endured a brutal and devastating civil war from 1992 to 1997. The conflict was well summarised by Barnett Rubin thusly:

*The attempt by political forces excluded from the communist system of power to democratise this weak state soon degenerated into an inchoate, brutal civil war. As institutions broke down, an insecure population increasingly fell back on whatever resources it could find for collective action and self-defence, namely armed struggle based on ethnic and clan affiliations and aid from whatever external sources were willing to give it. The resulting disorder resembled Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia or Liberia, and the human disaster it produced rivalled any of them.<sup>4</sup>*

Overshadowed by more proximate and seemingly more relevant conflicts in the Balkans and West Africa, the Tajik war drew little extra-regional attention despite claiming 50,000 to 100,000 lives, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, and sparking serious cross-border crises with neighbouring Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Yet it warrants serious examination to this day, for two reasons. First, although the war was formally resolved in 1997 following an exhaustive peace process, the devastating political, economic and humanitarian consequences of the conflict linger. Tajikistan remains one of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the

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<sup>4</sup> Rubin (1993), 71.

world, straddling an immense narco-trafficking route out of Afghanistan that inhibits the foundations of good governance and economic development. The Tajik population endures severe unemployment and economic deprivation, political repression, and ongoing social tensions that were unaddressed within the political reconciliation process. Thus, a more comprehensive analysis of the events and impact of the civil war contributes to the continuing efforts to stabilise and reconstruct a geostrategically important state.

Second, there is a growing awareness that contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns and interventions would benefit from conflict analysis that goes beyond the classic insurgencies of the Cold War and decolonisation eras and looks for insights from the complex intrastate conflicts of the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> The Tajik war possessed a number of characteristics that make it relevant to today's ongoing conflicts, including:

- Irregular, intrastate warfare to which external and neighbouring states contributed arms, sanctuaries and other resources
- The presence of multiple actors and factions, requiring non-dyadic strategies
- War-fighting dominated by militias and non-state actors, including powerful criminal groups
- Overlapping regional, ethnic and religious aims and institutions
- The use of 'ethnic cleansing' and civilian victimisation as military strategies
- Post-conflict strategies of militia and warlord incorporation, leading to negative security and governance outcomes

The outbreak of civil war so soon after independence created a relatively unusual conflict dynamic in which the regime did not possess a state armed force to confront its challengers and thus had to rely upon non-state militias.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Tajik civil war offers an array of non-state armed forces which could be examined within the remit of this dissertation, as atrocities were committed by all parties to the conflict. The rationale for focusing on the pro-government Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT) is largely a methodological one: there is marginally more data available on PFT activities and its leadership, many of whom assumed prominent roles in the post-war political sphere.

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<sup>5</sup> On the utility of examining intrastate wars of the 1990s for counterinsurgency strategy today, see Metz (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Kalyvas refers to civil wars with no state armed force as 'symmetric non-conventional wars'. Another notable example is the Liberian civil war (1987-2003). Kalyvas (2005), 92.

The PFT was founded and led primarily by Sangak Safarov, a notorious crime boss in the southern region of Kulyab who had spent more than twenty years in prison for crimes ranging from extortion to murder. Yet within months of the outbreak of war in 1992, he became one of the most powerful men in Tajikistan, with the political leverage to engineer a Kulyabi takeover of the government, negotiate with Russian and Uzbek officials, and dictate strategies for dealing with opposition forces and refugees.

How did this common thug become a kingmaker and nationally feared warlord? I argue that his rapid acquisition of power and influence stemmed in large part from his ruthless campaigns against civilians in Dushanbe and southern Tajikistan. To be sure, it was not the sole determinant – after all, all parties to the conflict targeted civilians, and the outcome of the war also hinged on the superior weaponry and military capabilities that the PFT acquired in the autumn of 1992. But the ultimate success of the PFT's strategic choices could not have occurred had the strategic decision to target civilians not been taken. In other words, civilian victimisation was a necessary (if not sufficient) factor in the PFT victory. Whilst it is often theorised that targeting civilians is counterproductive in war (as discussed in Section 1.4) this was clearly not the case for the PFT. Thus, this case study contributes to a growing understanding of the diversity of outcomes for the perpetrators of civilian victimisation.

The PFT was formally disbanded a year into the conflict (March 1993) but many of its field commanders and members continued to operate as conflict actors over the following four years. Thus, whilst the case study focuses on the PFT as a unitary actor only for the first year of the war, it continues to trace the activities and impact of PFT members throughout the course of the conflict.

## **1.2 Definitions and Scope of Inquiry**

In examining civilian victimisation by the PFT during the Tajik civil war, this dissertation engages with a number of conceptual elements that lack consistent and enduring definitions. The decision to utilise particular interpretations or definitions has been informed by current scholarly consensus, trends in contemporary analytical thinking, and a cross-disciplinary approach to the question at hand.



First, the type of actor that this dissertation focuses upon – the non-state actor – is subject to varying definitions depending on analytical context and field of study. Within security studies, and within a context of intrastate conflict, non-state actors generally refer to armed groups, distinct from the state, which engage in violence for the purpose of political, religious or other objectives.<sup>7</sup> It is not uncommon to find reference in the literature to *armed* non-state actors or *violent* non-state actors, but the sole context of intrastate war addressed in this dissertation obviates the need for such distinctions here (generally, non-violent non-state actors in intrastate wars are referred to as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or civil society actors). The defining attributes of non-state actors are not fixed; today, for example, the traditional notion that non-state actors automatically possess less legitimacy and authority than states is challenged by new ways of looking at sub-state governance.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, the key definitional features of a non-state actor are: 1) its acquisition of a unit-level identity distinct from state actors; 2) its collective use of violence; and 3) its formulation of some kind of conflict-related objective, however broad and loosely defined at the individual level.

In a context of civil war and contested legitimacy – especially a civil war such as Tajikistan’s, which did not feature a state armed force in its decisive stages – it is especially important to consider carefully the application of the term ‘non-state actor’. Often, the label is more or less reflexively applied to any armed group other than the professional state armed forces – but in conditions of state breakdown and near anarchy, does the state/non-state dichotomy still hold true? If an armed group acquires governance functions in a defined territory, is it still a thoroughly non-state actor? What ambiguity is attached to the term when armed groups receive considerable support from state actors, domestically or externally?

In the case of Tajikistan, however, I argue that the state did not disintegrate to such an extent or for such a length of time that the state/non-state dichotomy cannot be applied to the PFT. The central government in Dushanbe, while weak, volatile and contested, maintained a minimal continuity of existence even during the height of the conflict, after which it gradually succeeded in reimposing its authority on most of the country. The PFT did receive considerable support from domestic and external state actors (as is common for non-state conflict actors) but operated autonomously within Tajikistan and for its own purposes, thus further earning the ‘non-state’ label.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Bartolomei, et al. (2004); Bellal, et al. (2011), 48. Whilst in-depth explorations of the concept of ‘non-state actor’ are common in the broader field of international relations (where it has a more complicated history), security scholars tend to focus on defining specific non-state species (e.g., terrorists, insurgents) rather than the category as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> Menkhaus (2010); Heuser (2012).

Second, definitions of civilian victimisation (also referred to as civilian targeting) tend to be state-based. One of the most commonly used definitions, for example, is ‘a government-sanctioned military strategy that intentionally targets and kills noncombatants or involves operations that will predictably kill large numbers of noncombatants’.<sup>9</sup> Removing the ‘government-sanctioned’ modifier, however, leaves a definition of civilian victimisation that remains useful for the purposes of this dissertation.

The second element of this definition – ‘operations that will *predictably* kill’ – is critical for the approach taken here. Non-state armed forces typically do not operate under coherent military doctrines or in conformance with international humanitarian law. Their war-fighting tends to rely on indirect military strategies and the fomenting of instability and unrest, all of which predictably victimise civilians even if this is not the sole or primary purpose of the group’s acts. Thus, I concur with the approach taken by Alexander Downes and Benjamin Valentino (two leading scholars of victimisation) in utilising a fairly broad definition of civilian victimisation that includes not only massacres, ethnic cleansing, mass displacement and sieges, but any use of indiscriminate force or coercion that might predictably lead to civilian suffering (for example, seizing the assets of a collective farm, which would predictably leave its residents with no food or livelihoods).<sup>10</sup> The subset of victimisation limited to direct violence against civilians – including ‘rape, mutilations, torture and killing’ – may be more specifically categorised as *atrocities*.<sup>11</sup> While this direct violence tends to be more visible and receive more attention, I argue that an in-depth analysis of the functions and outcomes of victimisation requires a broader consideration of the full scope of civilian suffering (as explicated in Chapter 4).

The concept of civilian victimisation is also complicated by the fact that ‘civilian’ is a normative construct subject to varying interpretations across time and culture (norms being defined here as ‘collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity’).<sup>12</sup> This dissertation uses the ‘negative definition’ of civilian offered in Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions: ‘the civilian population is made up of persons who are not members of the armed forces’.<sup>13</sup> Article 50 explains the use of a negative definition as both necessary

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<sup>9</sup> Downes (2008), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 14-16; Valentino (2004), 10. Note that both Downes and Valentino focus on victimisation by state actors.

<sup>11</sup> See Heuser (2012) for an extended definition and discussion of atrocities in intrastate conflict.

<sup>12</sup> Katzenstein (1996), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977: Article 50, Paragraph 1. Accessed 10 October 2007 at: <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/COM/470-750064?OpenDocument>

given the widely varying interpretations of 'civilian', and the best possibility for precision given the consensus opinion on what constitutes a member of an armed force.

This definitional problem is further complicated in intrastate warfare, however, due to the blurring of the combatant/noncombatant distinction under conditions of irregular warfare (as discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Non-state armed groups usually pursue the strategic advantage of embedding themselves within the legally protected civilian population. By making distinction difficult for the state actor, non-state armed groups protect themselves from the direct use of force while also luring the state into the strategically risky strategy of indiscriminate warfare.<sup>14</sup> In addition, civilian involvement in non-state violence – whether voluntary or coerced – includes a wide range of activities, from supplying food, sanctuary and intelligence to participating in violent actions on an occasional basis.<sup>15</sup> The temporary and/or limited nature of these activities lends further ambiguity to the usual process of distinction. However, in the case of the Tajik civil war, these definitional issues are not a substantial problem for the purposes of postwar analysis. The widespread use of pre-existing solidarity groups (including well-known security forces and mafia gangs) and the fact that only combatants were likely to be armed – there was an extremely low rate of gun ownership in Tajikistan prior to the war, and the small arms that were rapidly disbursed at the beginning of the conflict ended up with organised militias on both sides<sup>16</sup> – served as additional proxy variables for distinction during armed conflict, and thus ameliorated some of the ambiguity concerns usually present in civil wars. In short, the concept of 'civilian victimisation' can be confidently deployed in analysis of the Tajik war, albeit with careful consideration of its normative aspects.

Third, the specific war considered within this dissertation's case study – the Tajik civil war – is here presumed to stretch from the outbreak of sustained military activities in June 1992 to the formal acceptance of the peace accords in June 1997. One key element of ambiguity within the conflict is the fact that no one can say with any certainty how many fatalities it produced. Estimates range from 25,000 (which the scholar Muriel Atkin calls 'implausibly low') to 100,000, with most accounts presenting a range of 50,000 to 60,000.<sup>17</sup> Estimates of internally displaced persons and refugees range from 500,000 to 1,000,000.<sup>18</sup> Variance in these estimates is the inevitable result of a brutal conflict in which atrocities were not recorded or

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<sup>14</sup> Walzer (1977), 176-87; Kalyvas (2006).

<sup>15</sup> See Wolf (1965) for a good overview of popular 'inputs' to insurgent groups.

<sup>16</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 59; Tadjbakhsh (2008), 9 and (1994), 173.

<sup>17</sup> Atkin (1997b), 279; Akiner (2001), 44; Rubin (1993), 87; Kilavuz (2009), 694. The highest estimate encountered in the literature was 157,000 – 300,000, in Matveeva (2009), 2.

<sup>18</sup> UN Security Council Report (December 1995), 7; Human Rights Watch (1993), 29, and (1996), 4.

reported, victims were quickly buried (in line with local traditions) or simply disappeared, there were no post-war mechanisms to account for the dead, and refugees were not systematically counted or tracked.<sup>19</sup> I have reflected the general consensus in the literature in settling upon 50,000 dead as the most probable estimate for war-time fatalities.

Examining the Tajik war also requires grappling with the difficulties of consistently transliterating place and proper names. Historically, names were transliterated from Tajik into Russian, and then into English, although more recently scholars and journalists have made a practice of transliterating directly from Tajik to English.<sup>20</sup> In addition, place names were frequently changed throughout the Soviet sphere, and again with the break-up of the Soviet Union. As a result of these two factors, a single city in Tajikistan might be represented in the literature by a dozen different forms. I have followed the example of scholars, such as Shirin Akiner, who favour the cause of clarity over rigid consistency and use the most common or familiar variations of Tajik place and proper names.<sup>21</sup> In addition, to minimise confusion between quoted material from the historical record and the textual analysis of the case study, in many cases the spellings in use during the civil war period are employed rather than contemporary variations (most notably, today's 'Kulob' and 'Qurghonteppa' are rendered in their 1992 spellings: 'Kulyab' and 'Kurgan-Tyube').<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, in discussing the PFT and other non-state forces, the dissertation refers to criminal actors – yet 'criminal' is a normative term whose use should be carefully considered rather than automatically applied (especially given the tendency of state actors to criminalise non-state rivals in order to delegitimise them<sup>23</sup>). Ideas of what constitutes criminality vary not only across cultures and societies but across historical and political epochs; the robust literature on 'state formation as organised crime' attests to the highly normative and evolving character of criminality (as well as the concepts of legitimacy and governance).<sup>24</sup> Notions of criminality in warfare are further fraught with definitional problems, as acts that would be considered criminal in peacetime undergo a form of 'norm-stretching' during war that renders them more acceptable as 'coping mechanisms' necessary for survival.<sup>25</sup> For example, many civilians must rely on smuggling, theft and the black market to survive during prolonged sieges or occupation

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<sup>19</sup> Such factors afflict most civil wars, leading to serious quantitative issues in civil war analysis. Kalyvas (2006), 48-50.

<sup>20</sup> This shift is noted in, for example, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 4 December 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Akiner (2001), as described in prefatory notes. See also Abdullaev and Barnes (2001) for a similar explication.

<sup>22</sup> 'Kulyab' and 'Kurgan-Tyube' are still in use in many contexts today (for example, in modern maps), thus making the anachronism slightly more palatable for scholarly purposes.

<sup>23</sup> Heuser (2012).

<sup>24</sup> For a classic argument of state-building as organised crime, see Tilly (1985); for a more recent exploration, see Cramer (2006), in particular Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>25</sup> Goodhand (2004); Williams (2003), 93.

– yet few would consider them criminals for doing so. Thus, I have relied less upon legal definitions of crime than upon political economy and constructivist approaches, which more accurately capture the environment of a society where law and order has broken down or been corrupted.

Nevertheless, adopting a more flexible approach toward the concept of crime does not necessarily negate one's ability to judge whether a particular group can be termed criminal. In the case of the PFT, for example, many of its leaders and members were criminals (in the most legal sense of the word) before the outbreak of war, having served prison sentences; and their behaviour during the war included acts that violated not only pre-war laws but traditional social norms, such as theft and extortion.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the norm-stretching that occurs during most conflicts does not erase the notion of crime, but rather generates more forgiving interpretations when it is engaged in for the purposes of survival (at the individual or collective level) rather than profit. It is true that in states with extremely long conflict periods, such as Afghanistan, where a deep and complex war economy has been established, the distinction between 'licit' and 'illicit' becomes significantly problematic.<sup>27</sup> But the period of state breakdown in Tajikistan was relatively short and non-pervasive; laws did not disappear entirely, but were unenforced in certain areas for a set period of time (especially in its later stages, the dominant paradigm for the Tajik war was not anarchy but impunity). In short, a reluctance to define a group solely by its criminal characteristics (and thus neglect its political and strategic character) does not necessitate the denial of its criminal activities and membership, despite the potential normative hazards.

Finally, in extrapolating insights about modern warfare from the case of the PFT, the dissertation uses the term intrastate war, defined here as sustained military conflict between two or more forces within the boundaries of a sovereign state.<sup>28</sup> I further use the high-fatality-threshold definition of war as sustained military conflict – namely, at least 1,000 annual deaths.<sup>29</sup> This is intended to help emphasise that any conclusions within this dissertation regarding non-state armed forces are intended to apply only to non-state actors operating in conditions of intrastate war, and not sub-war conditions of political violence. For example, the broader insights and framework developed in this dissertation will not generally apply to actors who engage solely in terrorist activities – as, by definition, such actions are aimed

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<sup>26</sup> As noted in Henry (2009), some normative attitudes toward crime appear to supercede legal and societal variations: most cultures, for example, find stealing unacceptable.

<sup>27</sup> Goodhand (2004).

<sup>28</sup> The analytical evolution from 'civil war' to 'intrastate war' is well summarized in Sarkees, et al. (2003), 49-70.

<sup>29</sup> As exemplified in the scope for inclusion by the Correlates of War Project: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org>

primarily at civilian targets.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that war-fighting forces do not make use of terrorism, but they also engage in armed combat and thus confront a range of targets with a higher degree of military utility than the often symbolic targets chosen by terrorist groups.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the 'target landscape' for war-fighting forces is not quite the same as that for terrorist groups, and thus an attempt to trace targeting choices and their consequences is better served by considering these types of forces separately (although it can be expected that insights relevant to one type may prove adaptable to the other to some degree).

### 1.3 Research Approach and Methodology

This dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of civilian victimisation by non-state armed forces via an in-depth examination of the Tajik civil war. Interrogating such a complex and under-explored case requires a theoretical framework capable of organising and accommodating a large array of actors and outcomes, whilst adhering to broader assumptions of instrumentality and multivariate drivers. Thus, I have utilised the strategic approach to construct a comprehensive case study of the civil war and an explanatory model for civilian victimisation by one of its prominent non-state participants. As this dissertation aims to be explanatory, not just descriptive, and as the actual motivations of the PFT are opaque and their strategic effects so complex, the strategic approach helps immeasurably in providing *likely* drivers and *organising* the effects. It also helps organise the conclusions from this case study into a form that could potentially be applied to other conflicts, for maximum translatability. In short, this combination of case study and explanatory model is, I believe, the most effective way of contributing significant information and insights in the service of the overall research aim.

#### 1.3.1 Key Elements and Assumptions of the Strategic Approach

This dissertation utilises the *strategic approach* to analyse the drivers of civilian victimisation by a non-state armed force, and then trace this strategic choice to its short and long-term consequences. As conceptualised by scholars such as M.L.R. Smith and Peter Neumann, the strategic approach encompasses several key principles that render it useful for this dissertation's objectives:

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<sup>30</sup> Schmid (2011) offers a definition of terrorism, based upon an extended consultative and consensus-building process with experts and academics, that includes: 'The main direct victims of terrorist attacks are in general not any armed forces but usually civilians, non-combatants or other innocent and defenceless persons' (p. 86-87). See also: Walzer (1977), 197; Ganor (2002), 288.

<sup>31</sup> Neumann and Smith (2005).

- Its primary unit of analysis is the behaviour of conflict actors, and it lacks theoretical impediments to the analysis of *non-state* actors.
- It does not depend on a single or narrow definition of strategy, but broadly focuses on an actor's efforts to correlate means and ends.<sup>32</sup>
- It presumes the collective use of force to be *instrumental*, in that it is purposefully employed to attain political objectives.
- It assumes conflict actors are *rational*, in that they engage in some form of cost-benefit calculation and choose what they believe to be the optimal means of achieving their aims.
- It encourages concomitant yet separate analysis of an actor and its environment, thus enabling a broader and potentially multivariate explication of strategic choices.

In short, the strategic approach offers a framework that is flexible enough to accommodate non-state actors and non-conventional conflict, whilst maintaining the key principles of strategic theory and thus anchoring analysis within a long-developed intellectual tradition. As Smith explains:

*The essence of the strategic approach is simply to trace the line of thinking of a particular political entity in order to comprehend how it proposes to achieve its objectives; and also to look at the ideological assumptions and values that underlie that entity's thinking and how this informs the way it formulates its strategy. Like most analytical frameworks, strategic theory offers a way of reducing an amorphous mass to manageable proportions and of imposing intellectual structure and discipline where there may well be none.*<sup>33</sup>

One of the greatest advantages of the strategic approach is that it enables analysis of an actor's normative and cultural influences whilst acknowledging the important mediating role of the strategic environment.<sup>34</sup> This is critical because existing approaches to the question of civilian victimisation tend to privilege either normative or strategic influences upon an actor's targeting decisions – even though an examination of the empirical evidence across a number of cases suggests that conflict actors themselves are not bound by such strictures, and that it is

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<sup>32</sup> According to Smith, 'The broadest but perhaps the most acceptable definition of strategy in this respect was that given by Basil Liddell Hart, who described strategy as the "art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy"'. Smith (1997), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Smith (1997), 4. For a literature review of the strategic approach, see Harris (2006).

<sup>34</sup> The strategic environment may be defined as 'the determinant of the information that is available to an actor and the structure within which actors operate'. Harris (2006), 542.

the interplay of multiple variables that affects their behaviour toward civilians. By disaggregating actors from their environment, and considering each in turn, the strategic approach highlights the effects of an actor's values and 'preference structure' on its strategic choices and on eventual outcomes.<sup>35</sup> Yet unlike some strictly culturalist models, the strategic approach does not neglect the role of the strategic environment in determining the actions and information available to an actor. Thus, this dissertation situates itself within a small but emerging field of analyses that draw upon both ideational and rationalist approaches within strategic studies.<sup>36</sup>

However, I have expanded the typical application of the strategic approach in two ways. First, I have expanded the usual timeframe under consideration, examining not just the short-term outcomes of targeting decisions but long-term strategic effects after the conclusion of a conflict. Second, I have added 'criminal' incentives and effects to the normative and strategic factors usually considered. In this way, this dissertation serves to test the boundaries of the strategic approach and demonstrate its potential usefulness for a broader range of research questions.

In sum, the strategic approach offers a flexible means of considering multiple drivers of an actor's behaviour within the context of a specific strategic environment. It can thus cope with the strictures of a case study in which the principal actor under consideration was a non-state criminal militia that confronted a range of other non-state armed groups before being absorbed by a newly independent regime and participating in counterinsurgent operations.

### **1.3.2 Applying the Strategic Approach to Civilian Victimisation by the PFT**

I argue that applying the strategic approach to civilian victimisation by a non-state armed force, with the aim of understanding short and long-term outcomes, requires five consequential steps:

1. Evaluating the strategic environment and the strategic discourse during the conflict
2. Providing a scope and typology of the behaviour under analysis
3. Analysing strategic choices and decision-making by the conflict actor(s)
4. Evaluating near-term strategic effects and outcomes
5. Proposing long-term strategic effects and outcomes

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<sup>35</sup> Harris (2006), 542-44.

<sup>36</sup> Smith (1997); Neumann (2003); Valentino (2004b). See also: Farrell (2005), 448.



I have followed this five-step approach in my analysis of civilian victimisation by the PFT, and it forms the basis for the structure of this dissertation.

The first step is to consider the strategic environment and the strategic discourse that shaped the conflict and the targeting decisions of its participants. I have done this by providing a thorough analysis of the structural and historical drivers that shaped the strategic environment (Chapter 2), followed by an in-depth strategic history of the Tajik civil war and the role of the PFT within it (Chapter 3). These two chapters, in essence, form the empirical case study upon which the subsequent analysis is based. Because civilian victimisation was a consistent feature of the civil war, and cannot be neatly separated from its key events and actors, it is necessary to present the broader context of the conflict in order to understand the evolving dynamics and incentives that affected targeting decisions as well as the strategic outcomes that the PFT experienced. The lack of existing strategic histories of the war and case studies of the PFT also necessitated the construction of these chapters, as discussed in Section 1.4.

The second step aims to answer the first element of the central research question (*how did the PFT target civilians?*) by corraling the countless individual instances of victimisation into manageable and meaningful categories of analysis. Chapter 4 thus commences the interrogation of the case study by providing a typology of victimisation in Tajikistan and situating the PFT within it. It is a key step not only for narrowing the scope of behaviour that the strategic approach is being applied to, but for facilitating the subsequent analysis of the relationship between specific types of victimisation and particular conflict dynamics.

The third step addresses the next part of the overall research question: *why did the PFT target civilians?* Given the lack of existing theory for *non-state* targeting of civilians, I examine the Tajik case study and its typology of victimisation through the prism of an original model that considers three sets of targeting incentives: normative, strategic and criminal. This incentives model conceptualises civilian victimisation not as a singular phenomenon but as the result of a choice between two competing options – civilian victimisation (the deliberate targeting of noncombatants) vs. restraint (targeting of a predominantly military nature). In warfare, there exist ample incentives not to target civilians, and thus any explanation for civilian victimisation should account for why these incentives are overridden. Thus, I argue that the variables that potentially affect non-state-actor targeting behaviour may be grouped into six categories:

| <b>Table 1.1 Incentives for Civilian Victimisation by Non-State Actors</b> |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Category of Incentives</b>                                              | <b>Binary Choice</b> |
| Normative                                                                  | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |
| Strategic                                                                  | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |
| Criminal                                                                   | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |

Normative incentives include the societal and legal norms that aim to induce restraint, as well as the processes of demonisation and ideological influences that override these strong taboos and lead to victimisation. Strategic incentives refer to the rationalist consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of civilian victimisation for the purpose of achieving military and political aims. Criminal incentives, also highly rationalist, include the aspects of decision-making that take account of the criminal imperatives for profit and market protection. All of these incentives, taken together, will have varying levels of influence upon targeting decisions, either directly or by overriding each other. Chapter 5 considers each of these six groups of incentives, evaluating the strength and weakness of each and the manner in which they interacted and were manifested in targeting decisions and strategic behaviour during the Tajik civil war.

The fourth step is to determine the effect of strategic choices on strategic outcomes in the conflict (i.e.: *what were the strategic effects in the near term?*). Based on a thorough review of the literature, I argue that there are five aspects of intrastate war in which the effects of civilian victimisation are particularly manifest: military strategies and operations; the escalation and resolution of conflict; the dispersion of violence; territory and resource acquisition; and legitimacy. Chapter 6 examines the relationship between civilian victimisation

and conflict dynamics in the Tajik war in depth, before evaluating the role that victimisation played in the PFT's overall strategic outcomes.

Typical applications of the strategic approach might stop here. However, this dissertation includes a fifth step, which is to continue this line of analysis by considering post-conflict developments that derive from a non-state actor's targeting decisions during warfare. It thus addresses the final element of the research question: *what were the strategic effects in the long term?* Perhaps because it is now taken for granted that intrastate wars will experience high civilian casualty levels, the specific links between civilian victimisation and long-term consequences are not often explicitly traced; the roots of a particular security problem may be attributed to 'the war' generally rather than civilian casualties specifically. Yet it is possible to discern direct and indirect linkages between civilian victimisation in warfare and ongoing or emerging phenomena within the postwar strategic environment. The purpose here is not to demonstrate a linear causality – to say that civilian victimisation directly and inexorably leads to a specific long-term phenomenon – but rather to illustrate the way in which civilian victimisation facilitates and contributes to long-lasting security problems. Chapter 7 thus considers the array of security threats facing postwar Tajikistan and evaluates the degree to which they can be traced to civilian victimisation during the civil war.

The completion of these five steps should thus serve to answer the research question: how and why did the PFT target civilians, and what were the short and long-term strategic effects? Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by evaluating these five steps and presenting key findings, whilst also considering whether the approach taken in this dissertation could be generalised in order to further theoretical analysis of civilian victimisation by non-state armed forces in intrastate war.

### **1.3.3 Research Design**

The research design for this dissertation was formulated following sustained inquiry into the challenges of researching the Tajik civil war. It was quickly established that a quantitative approach would not be feasible. Data on civilian casualties, always problematic in civil wars, is practically non-existent in the case of Tajikistan. Even the most utilised and authoritative conflict datasets – such as the PRIO and Uppsala datasets – contain only sparse references to the Tajik conflict. (For example, the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset, which reportedly includes civilian deaths by government and rebel forces in intrastate wars from 1989 to 2010, has but a single listing for Tajikistan: 34 civilians killed by government forces in 1992, a year in

which it is estimated that actually tens of thousands of people were killed.<sup>37</sup>) Accumulating such data, for even a small area, is extremely difficult due to a noted reticence among Tajiks to discuss the war – a silent testimony to both the emotional trauma of the war and the need to continue living amongst its worst perpetrators.<sup>38</sup>

However, a qualitative approach faced issues of its own. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, there is a serious lack of secondary and scholarly literature on the Tajik civil war. The literature that does exist tends to focus on the more documented aspects of the war, namely the diplomatic efforts to end it and the complex machinations of regional states drawn into the conflict. Information on the actual military conduct of the war and the strategic behaviour of its participants is extremely thin – a few pages here, a paragraph there. Taken together, however, it formed a skeleton of the conflict's trends and events.

This was then fleshed out by a comprehensive review of contemporary media reportage of the conflict, using Tajik, Russian, European and American sources (including newspapers, wire services, news magazines, and TV and radio transcripts). Fortunately, with the Tajik war occurring at the end of the Cold War period, I was able to take advantage of the then still-copious translations of Russian and Tajik news sources into English (particularly by the BBC's 'Summary of World Broadcasts' service). This constituted the bulk of the primary source research for this dissertation, as I reviewed an estimated 5,000 articles and wire reports. Because of the inherent flaws in the source material – given the difficulties of accurate reporting in the midst of a conflict, coupled with the lingering authoritarian attitudes toward the press in post-Soviet Tajikistan – all of the reportage was carefully evaluated, using a consistent 'triangulation of data' approach. Most often, this involved comparisons of reportage across Tajik, Russian and Western news sources, or between print and broadcast media; I also attempted to reconcile news accounts with official reports and scholarly works. Much of the reportage could not be faithfully utilised: for example, I quite often had to disregard Tajik opposition radio reports, as their accounts were not matched by any other sources. Generally, however, this process yielded a vastly improved amount of data and information on the use of violence by non-state forces during the conflict. For the first time, it became possible to trace the movements of particular actors and the impact upon civilians throughout the war.

This close media analysis allowed a more granular analysis of conflict dynamics, and thus enabled more nuanced and in-depth interpretations of key events and arenas of victimisation.

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<sup>37</sup> Dataset available at: [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp\\_one-sided\\_violence\\_dataset/](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_one-sided_violence_dataset/) [last accessed 2 February 2012]

<sup>38</sup> Heathershaw (2011), 2; Wiegmann (2009), 91.

For example, whilst virtually all secondary sources note the outbreak of armed clashes in Dushanbe during the first week of May 1992, few narrow the first occurrence to the evening of May 5, and only one notes its immediate catalysing incident. In most accounts, the first shots seem to happen rather spontaneously and perhaps inevitably – yet the media accounts reveal that a roadblock confrontation outside the capital was actually the immediate catalyst for the first armed clashes in Dushanbe, after weeks in which tens of thousands of people refrained from violence during mass demonstrations.<sup>39</sup> As another example, this review of the media reportage reveals a far more serious crisis at the Tajik-Afghan border during the 1993-1997 phase of the war than the secondary literature usually conveys. Armed incursions by hundreds of Tajik militants, and Russian artillery and helicopter assaults on Afghan bases and towns, actually made the Tajik-Afghan border one of the more dangerous and destabilising zones in the former Soviet space (particularly after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban). Finally, the considerable human costs of continued conflict in eastern Tajikistan during this period, including hundreds of deaths and tens of thousands of newly displaced people, are similarly neglected by studies that reference merely sporadic and low-grade combat in the area. Thus, the use of media resources to expand the strategic history of the civil war represents an empirical contribution to the field, in presenting and summarising the key developments and behaviour of conflict actors during this time period to a degree not typically undertaken.

This dissertation also benefited from twenty-nine semi-structured interviews conducted during a research trip to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>40</sup> Fieldwork in Tajikistan presents many challenges. As noted, the civil war is a strongly taboo subject of conversation socially, and an ethically problematic topic to broach with people given the extreme trauma that most Tajiks living in the war-affected regions experienced. The perpetrators of civilian victimisation that I focus on in this dissertation – the PFT – became the most powerful political and criminal figures in the postwar era, and I could not expect people to openly discuss their past crimes. The government still monitors the press and foreign visitors; before going to Tajikistan, I was warned by a number of people with experience working in the country to be extremely discreet in my discussions, and not to keep any incriminating notes on my person. Whilst in the end I did not suffer undue harassment (except for the occasional surprise police visit), such warnings give an indication of some of the challenges of conducting research in an authoritarian and highly criminalised state.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 6 May 1992; *The Independent*, 6 May 1992. The only account to mention this incident was Human Rights Watch (1993).

<sup>40</sup> A number of international organisations and NGOs dealing with Tajikistan are based in Kyrgyzstan, for political and logistical reasons.

Due to these strictures, most of my interviews were conducted 'off the record', to minimise potential problems for both the interviewees and myself. The twenty-nine interviewees represented a range of institutions: local NGOs (4); international NGOs (6); UN agencies (8); local universities (6); EU agencies (3); and local media (2). (Some of the organisations represented include the OSCE; the UN Office on Drugs and Crime; the EU Border Management Programme; the Social Research Center of the American University of Central Asia; and International Crisis Group.) Seventeen of the interviewees were Tajik or Kyrgyz; twelve were foreign employees of international organisations or NGOs (most with long experience in Central Asia). The primary purpose of these interviews was to discuss Tajikistan's postwar security challenges, in order to enhance the analysis undertaken as part of the fifth step of my research approach (i.e., the long-term strategic effects of civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war). Overall, the interviews were extremely helpful in providing a front-line view of the efforts to combat narco-trafficking, militancy, corruption and poverty, as well as practitioner interpretations of the root causes of such challenges (which I have cited within the relevant chapters). In particular, speaking to practitioners in the field revealed the depth of Tajik corruption and its adverse effects on the population, and were a direct inspiration for my investigation of the political economy literature (which yielded the substantial portion of this dissertation dedicated to criminality as a form of civilian victimisation). In addition, my travels gave me a better appreciation of the spatial aspects of the civil war itself, as a drive from Dushanbe to and across the Afghan border emphasised the short distances involved and the alternately accessible and difficult terrain to be navigated. In short, my research trip proved a useful supplement to my scholarly research, providing me with a helpful filter of experience through which to assemble and evaluate documentary evidence.

I have also drawn upon field research conducted by other scholars (notably, Gunda Wiegmann, Idil Kilavuz, John Heathershaw and Sophie Roche) who were able to reside in Tajikistan for far longer than I could have hoped. In particular, the interviews with rural Tajik residents conducted by Kilavuz and Wiegmann and excerpted in their dissertations were a useful source of firsthand accounts for my study of civilian victimisation and the long-term effects on specific regional constituencies.<sup>41</sup> Finally, I also utilised reports from front-line aid agencies and NGOs (particularly the operational updates published by the Red Cross in Tajikistan and the observer reports produced by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki) in order to construct the strategic history of the conflict and the typology of victimisation within it.

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<sup>41</sup> Kilavuz (2007); Wiegmann (2009).

Another key aspect of the research design was the decision to conduct a micro-case study of the PFT. This is an increasingly popular and prevalent research method in the social sciences, as it allows a more granular analysis of complex phenomenon.<sup>42</sup> In this case, I felt that the question of why non-state forces engage in civilian victimisation would be better served by examining the behaviour of one specific non-state force rather than all the non-state participants in the conflict (which were many). In essence, I have sacrificed breadth for depth. A comparative study of all the non-state participants would be ideal, but would require far more time and space than allowed by this research project.

In sum, the research design utilised here was crafted in response to the significant challenges posed by conducting research on a little-known war, in an inhospitable environment, with a focus on events that were traumatic at both the personal and societal level.

## **1.4 Literature Review**

In this dissertation, I primarily (although not exclusively) draw upon three broad categories of literature: 1) civilian victimisation; 2) the political economy of conflict; 3) qualitative studies of the Tajik civil war. Each of these categories suffers from serious limitations, yet taken together they have enabled the construction of the Tajik case study and the analytical framework I have applied to it. This wide-ranging use of scholarly literature has been necessitated by the dearth of attention to the Tajik conflict and the lack of theorisation with respect to non-state-actor civilian victimisation. In the end, much of the literature on intrastate war and civilian victimisation could be only indirectly utilised, as it tends to focus on state actors and the causes (rather than conduct) of civil wars.

### **1.4.1 Civilian Victimisation by Non-State Actors**

It is not difficult to find *descriptive* accounts of civilian victimisation. Journalists, NGOs and humanitarian actors tend to focus on atrocities as dramatic and empathy-inspiring events that can encapsulate the broader experience of a conflict and prod external aid and intervention. Within the academic literature, however, civilian victimisation is not a major locus of attention. According to Valentino,

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<sup>42</sup> On the growing popularity of the micro-dynamics approach, see Kalyvas (2008).

*...scholarly writing on war and rebellion has generally neglected violence against civilians or simply assumed that this kind of violence is irrational, driven by sadism or the frenzy of battle. Scholars of war have devoted a great deal of effort to understanding the causes of conflict, but little systematic research has been conducted on its consequences, especially for civilian populations.*<sup>43</sup>

Stathis Kalyvas also notes that civil war violence against civilians 'is a phenomenon that has long remained off research limits because of its conceptual complexity and empirical opacity'.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, in the past two decades a growing body of literature has emerged that specifically addresses civilian victimisation.<sup>45</sup> The reasons for this are not definitive, but may be traced to such high-profile atrocities as those in Bosnia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, and ongoing intrastate wars with high civilian casualty levels in Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan. Investigations into the changing character of warfare also draw attention to the role of civilian victimisation, as high civilian casualty levels in intrastate wars offer a purported element of distinction from the presumably more restrained nature of modern inter-state war, whilst the current focus on counterinsurgency in US and UK military circles naturally leads to enhanced consideration of the role of the civilian population.

These works offer a wealth of insights to draw upon but several limitations must be overcome. First, the field is still limited and predominantly state-centric.<sup>46</sup> Historically, state forces have been more likely to target civilians on a mass scale, for several reasons related to their greater capacity and capabilities relative to non-state forces, as well as their greater difficulties with regard to distinction (given militant concealment within the population).<sup>47</sup> This greater incidence of civilian targeting by states helps account for the relative lack of literature on civilian targeting by non-state forces. Whilst state-centric theories of civilian victimisation are useful, they must be adapted significantly in order to have relevance to non-state forces, given that they face significantly different constraints, costs and opportunities relative to state actors. Second, the causes of civilian victimisation are usually attributed to either normative or strategic factors – for example, either ideology or asymmetric weakness – whilst a

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<sup>43</sup> Valentino, et al. (2004a), 379.

<sup>44</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 6.

<sup>45</sup> For example: Kalyvas (2006); Toft (2005); Kassimeris (2006); Downes (2008, 2006); Slim (2007); Kim (2010); Kaufman (2006); Mann (2007); Semelin (2005).

<sup>46</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 48; Weinstein (2007), 5. Even analyses that claim to include non-state actors may prove lacking: Arreguin-Toft (2003) professes to include non-state civilian victimisation in his study but the dataset he utilises does not include intrastate wars.

<sup>47</sup> Valentino (2004b), 385.



fundamental assumption underlying this dissertation is that both arenas must be considered in theorising target selection processes.

Perhaps because of the puzzle that civilian victimisation poses for rationalist analysis, the literature on its causes tends to bypass its instrumental nature – i.e., the extent to which it is engaged in deliberately and for some strategic purpose – and to choose from amongst a range of other causal factors that can be categorised into four groupings: psycho-emotional; culturalist; organisational; and structural.<sup>48</sup>

By far the oldest approach to civilian victimisation in warfare is to look to the psychological and emotional thought processes of individual human beings involved in combat.<sup>49</sup> Psycho-emotional explanations include the elaborations throughout history of why people ‘love war in strange and troubling ways’<sup>50</sup> – in other words, the ways in which it fulfils some sort of visceral, emotional need – as well as more modern analyses of the cognitive processes of different kinds of combatants, from national army recruits to suicide bombers.<sup>51</sup> Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men*, for example, offers an explanatory description of the atrocities committed by a reserve police battalion in Poland during the Second World War that emphasises the role of group conformity, peer pressure, racism and an inflated sense of superiority.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst focused on individual motivations, psycho-emotional explanations may offer useful insights regarding civilian victimisation at the small-group level. For example, the suggestion that those individuals most prone to violence are those who suffer from unsatisfied egotism may help explain the attractiveness of ‘vanguard forces’ in militant ideological movements and their consequent justifications for civilian victimisation.<sup>53</sup> However, psycho-emotional explanations on their own are not sufficient to account for civilian victimisation because they neglect its instrumental and unit-level characteristics.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the focus on individual motivations for violence and transgressive behaviour yields a study of its *expressive* qualities – it supposes violence as an end in itself, or at best a means to some symbolic or emotional goal,

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<sup>48</sup> The distinction should be made between the literature on the causes of conflict, in which rationalist theories are increasingly dominant, and the literature on the conduct of armed forces once conflict occurs, which is relatively smaller and less engaged with rationalist explanations. Kaufman (2006), 45-46.

<sup>49</sup> See Semelin (2005), particularly the literature review from pp. 17-51. See also Mueller (2004), 9-23; Baumeister (1996); van Creveld (1991); Grossman (1996).

<sup>50</sup> William Broyles, quoted in Kassimeris (2006), 4; Hedges (2002).

<sup>51</sup> For example, Grossman (1995); Post (1990); Gambetta (2005).

<sup>52</sup> Browning (1993).

<sup>53</sup> On the concept of ‘unsatisfied egotism’ see Baumeister (1996), 25.

<sup>54</sup> Horgan (2007).

but not a mechanism for the achievement of political aims.<sup>55</sup> It is probably true that at the level of the individual perpetrator, civilian victimisation is expressive violence. However, as an act of *collective* and deliberate violence it is instrumental, in the sense that it contributes in some way to the purposes of the group.<sup>56</sup> In short, psycho-emotional approaches yield theories of motivation but not strategy.

In addition, psycho-emotional explanations are less likely than other approaches to assume the rationality of actors; indeed, they are prone to asserting that civilian victimisation represents the apogee of human senselessness and evil.<sup>57</sup> However, assenting to this idea of perpetrators as irrational places the phenomenon of civilian victimisation outside the scope of social science or any other effort to theorise and thus hopefully attenuate its occurrence. As Isabelle Duyvesteyn writes, 'When irrationality is accepted as an explanation for the behaviour of actors, the researcher accepts that their actions cannot really be understood'.<sup>58</sup>

A turning point in the study of deliberate civilian victimisation in war came with Omer Bartov's *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (1985), which addressed the impact of ideological imperatives on the behaviour of combatants toward civilians. Bartov discussed the importance of conditions at the front and the composition of the officer corps but emphasised the correlation between extreme barbarism and the presence of 'some version of an *Untermenschen* ideology or, for that matter, religious fanaticism'.<sup>59</sup>

Culturalist explanations for civilian victimisation focus on a broad range of influences upon armed forces that engage in transgressive behaviour, including social, religious and ideological variables that facilitate a decision to attack civilians.<sup>60</sup> The advantage of such explanations is that they address both individual and unit-level violence. However, they risk prioritising cultural factors to such an extent that they appear deterministic, as if the strategic context and political aims of a group bear little relevance for its targeting decisions; in essence, they can obscure the instrumental and functionalist qualities of victimisation.<sup>61</sup> This was arguably the case with those works that laid the blame for post-Cold War ethnic conflict, such as occurred in

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<sup>55</sup> Coker (2002), 5-6; Cozzens (2007).

<sup>56</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 24-26; Crenshaw (1990), 7-9.

<sup>57</sup> Lake and Powell (1999), 30; Kalyvas (2006), 32-33.

<sup>58</sup> Duyvesteyn (2007), 121.

<sup>59</sup> Bartov (1985), 155.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of strategic culture and whether it can be analytically ascribed to non-state actors, see Howlett (2005).

<sup>61</sup> Ballentine and Nitzschke (2005), 5; Keen (2000), 20-21.

the Balkans, on immutable and primeval ethnic hatreds.<sup>62</sup> This approach has been challenged by studies showing that inter-ethnic hostility and violence tend to occur more often as a *result* of political violence and not as a causal factor.<sup>63</sup> More recent works on such concepts as ‘tribal warfare’ risk the same over-prioritisation of cultural variables to the detriment of strategic and political factors.<sup>64</sup>

A similar sense of determinism can creep into organisational explanations for civilian victimisation. A notable example of this subset of the literature is Jeremy Weinstein’s *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, one of the few scholarly works to directly theorise non-state-actor civilian victimisation. Weinstein argues that insurgent targeting choices are a function of the initial economic and social resources available to them, as these shape the membership and organisation of the group in ways that affect the likelihood of violence against civilians (for example, rebel groups with good access to economic inputs can offer selective rewards to recruits, thus attracting more opportunistic members who are less likely to show restraint toward civilians).<sup>65</sup> Whilst logical in its sub-arguments, the emphatic path-dependency embedded within this model and its explicit rejection of strategic discourse as a driver of targeting choices render it problematic as a generalisable model, especially for cases with significant in-conflict variation in behaviour. Its focus on the insurgency variant of civil war and reliance upon Cold War-era conflicts also limit its applicability for conflicts such as the Tajik civil war, which featured multiple non-state forces (instead of a state-insurgent dyad) and identity-based targeting during the most intense phase of the conflict. More useful for cases such as Tajikistan are the organisational arguments advanced by Abdulkader Sinno, who explicitly shuns ‘strategic determinism’ in his focus on the effects of organisational structure.<sup>66</sup>

Structural explanations prioritise the intrastate nature of modern warfare as the key variable in its propensity for civilian victimisation. They emphasise the lack of legal constraints; the strength of modern sovereignty norms, rendering external intervention problematic; the prevalence of paramilitary and thuggish forces not under the moderating influences of civil control; and the near inevitability of conflict occurring amongst civilian-populated areas as forces fight for territorial and political control.<sup>67</sup> For example, Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack note:

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Kaplan (1993). This analytical tendency has also been prominent in the scholarly literature on genocide. Valentino, et al. (2004), 379. On the discrediting of primordialist/culturalist arguments, see Chenoweth and Lawrence (2010), 8; Collins (2007), 68.

<sup>63</sup> Fearon and Laitin (2003), 75-90.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Shultz and Dew (2006).

<sup>65</sup> Weinstein (2007), 7-12. For a case-driven critique of this argument, see Metelits (2010).

<sup>66</sup> Sinno (2011).

<sup>67</sup> Mueller (2004), 67; Kalyvas (1999), 269; Yanacopulos and Hanlon (2006), 19.

*Interneccine conflicts are frequently the most vicious conflicts of all, with many accepted constraints on behavior in warfare falling by the wayside. In part, this is derived from the fact that in many civil wars, there are no organized armies standing between a civilian population and an attacking army; both armies are generally drawn from, and therefore intermingled with, the civilians, which is why levels of civilian deaths and other atrocities are often proportionately higher in civil wars.*<sup>68</sup>

Structural explanations are a key variable in accounting for civilian victimisation in intrastate war, but they tend to focus on those factors that facilitate rather than determine civilian victimisation. They may explain why it is easier for forces to attack civilians, but they cannot account for why forces would do so even when it is strategically counterproductive.

What is mostly lacking in the literature on civilian victimisation by non-state armed forces are theorisations based on strategic explanations.<sup>69</sup> It is often described as 1) counterproductive for non-state forces; 2) more avoidable because non-state forces have fewer problems with identifying enemy targets; and 3) utilised less frequently by non-state forces than states<sup>70</sup> – but the fact that non-state civilian victimisation nevertheless exists is inadequately theorised.

Fortunately, scholars in recent years have focused increasingly on strategic rationales for civilian victimisation. Alexander Downes has made great analytical strides in addressing the strategic logic in civilian victimisation, although thus far he has only focused on civilian victimisation by state actors.<sup>71</sup> Hugo Slim's comprehensive review of civilian victimisation (by both state and non-state actors) includes strategic as well as ideological factors in its typology of drivers.<sup>72</sup> Claire Metelits' study of three key insurgent groups (the SPLA, the FARC and the PKK) rests upon a theory of civilian victimisation driven by 'active rivalry' with state or non-state competitors.<sup>73</sup> The March 2012 special issue of *Civil Wars* directly addresses the question of why atrocities occur in civil wars; Beatrice Heuser and Kieran Mitton, in particular, discuss

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<sup>68</sup> Byman and Pollack (2007), 8. Like many authors, Byman and Pollack cite the disproportionate number of civilian deaths in civil war as a matter of convention and do not cite empirical sources.

<sup>69</sup> The literature on suicide operations includes strategic explanations (notably Robert Pape's *Dying to Win*) but thus far has focused more heavily on their use in terrorist campaigns, not intrastate warfare.

<sup>70</sup> These points are well summarized in Walzer (1977), 180; Heuser (2012). See also Kalyvas (2006), 73, 89-91, 144.

<sup>71</sup> Downes (2008, 2007, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Slim (2007), 121.

<sup>73</sup> Metelits (2010).

the potential for strategic logic in atrocities (as well as the explanatory limits of such frameworks).<sup>74</sup>

Most notably, Stathis Kalyvas' landmark work, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, sets forth an influential rationalist theory of civilian victimisation linked to territorial control by state or non-state actors, although to some extent it also prioritises civilian victimisation by the state in its analysis (for example, in a chapter setting forth a 'logic of indiscriminate violence', Kalyvas briefly notes that insurgents are capable of indiscriminate violence but devotes the entirety of his analysis to violence by the state actor).<sup>75</sup> His earlier work on the Algerian civil war, however, focuses on civilian victimisation by the non-state Islamist rebels in Algeria's conflict of the 1990s:

*The central thesis is that massacres can be understood as part of a rational strategy aiming to punish and deter civilian defection under specific constraints. Massacres are likely to be committed by insurgents in the context of a particular strategic conjuncture characterised by (a) fragmented and unstable rule over the civilian population, (b) mass civilian defections toward incumbents and (c) escalation of violence.*<sup>76</sup>

A number of elements from Kalyvas' work inform the arguments presented in this dissertation: that civilians will comply with the most credible coercive threats; that levels of violence can be linked to levels of control and contestation in a given territory; that escalation is a significant variable affecting civilian victimisation; and that civilian victimisation cannot be reduced to irrational or purposeless barbarity. However, I depart from the Kalyvas approach in attempting to incorporate normative factors and criminal incentives into explanations of civilian victimisation. Kalyvas is dismissive of the role of ideology in driving massacres, believing that the consistent ideology of the Islamists coupled with their varying levels of victimisation indicate that the latter is not driven by the former. However, I argue that ideational factors play an important role in affecting strategic considerations of the utility of civilian victimisation as well as 'stretching' norms, which may account for variation over time. I also argue that models focused solely on political competition and coercive violence in civil war, such as Kalyvas', do not fully capture the dynamics of civilian victimisation, as both eliminationist and

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<sup>74</sup> Heuser (2012); Mitton (2012). Heuser's article, interestingly, follows a similar pattern as other works on civilian victimisation, in aiming to explore atrocities by all actors but focusing in the end on state actors.

<sup>75</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 167.

<sup>76</sup> Kalyvas (1999), 245.

criminal actors account for a substantial portion of violence against civilians.<sup>77</sup> Finally, the Kalyvas approach is difficult to graft onto the Tajik conflict, as it was not a binary conflict between a state and an insurgent actor, but rather a multilateral smorgasbord involving many non-state domestic actors with intervention from foreign states.

In sum, what has emerged to date are a range of partial explanations for non-state-actor civilian victimisation in intrastate warfare. The use of the strategic approach – which incorporates both actor-level and environmental characteristics and allows the consideration of both strategic and normative drivers – enables analysis that includes the best features of these existing theories whilst transcending their explanatory limitations.

Finally, with respect to literature on the short and long-term effects of civilian victimisation, the impact of targeting choices on the dynamics of conflict receives greater attention within the literature on insurgency and intrastate war. Here as well the focus tends to be on civilian targeting by state forces, but non-state forces receive more attention within this arena than they do in the causation literature. Overall, this set of literature advances the argument that attacks on civilians by non-state forces violate the principles of guerrilla warfare (in particular, Maoist insurgent principles): using violence and coercion against civilians rather than non-violent means of gaining popular support risks being strategically counterproductive, in that it jeopardises a non-state actor's key potential resource (popular support).<sup>78</sup> The classic case study for this argument is the Algerian Islamists and their disastrous campaign during the 1990s civil war, when the brutal slaughter of thousands of civilians eliminated popular support for what had previously been a strong anti-government opposition.<sup>79</sup> Other exemplars include the Bosnian mujahidin, Chechen guerrillas and Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq.

What is less likely to be noted are the short and medium-term successes that may result from civilian victimisation. In West Africa, for example, Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh 'were able to invade Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively with little more than a hundred men and bring both countries to their knees within a year by dramatically killing, cutting people's arms off and abducting their children'.<sup>80</sup> Atrocities committed by Al Qaeda in Iraq may have backfired in the long run, but in the short term they succeeded in sparking sectarian warfare between Sunni and Shi'a communities (a key strategic aim). In short, it is important to consider that

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<sup>77</sup> Note that Kalyvas excludes identity-based and/or eliminationist violence from his scope conditions, thereby excluding a great many modern conflicts from his analysis (including the Tajik conflict).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, O'Neill (1990), 84-85; Walzer (2006), 179-87; US Department of the Army (2004, 2006); Heuser (2012); Cronin (2006), 28; Michael and Scolnick (2006).

<sup>79</sup> Kalyvas (2009).

<sup>80</sup> Slim (2007), 158.

non-state forces may engage in civilian victimisation because sometimes, it does ‘work’ – even if only narrowly and in the short term.<sup>81</sup>

Less often considered are the long-term strategic effects of civilian victimisation, as most studies of civilian victimisation consider either its short-term strategic effects on the conflict or the long-term humanitarian impact on the country. This dissertation’s examination of the long-term strategic consequences of targeting choices aims to fill this rather serious gap in the literature.

#### **1.4.2 Criminal Actors and the Political Economy of Conflict**

Considering the Tajik civil war in depth highlights the fact that its later stages were increasingly ‘not about policy but rather access to resources’.<sup>82</sup> The war coincided with a massive expansion in regional narco-trafficking and the Tajik war economy provided considerable opportunities for corrupt and criminal actors. These activities were responsible for a substantial amount of civilian victimisation during and after the war, whilst also significantly affecting conflict resolution processes. Thus, this aspect of the conflict necessitates some utilisation of the literature on the political economy of conflict.

The distinction between political/ideological actors and criminal actors possesses an enduring attraction for scholars. Whilst ‘political’ armed groups are commonly seen as security threats to states that require a military response, ‘criminal’ groups are typically not thought to challenge the state and can be handled by domestic law enforcement.<sup>83</sup> The two categories of actors are also thought to have distinct aims and structures. However, whilst these two spheres of action can sometimes be meaningfully separated, more often within a conflict they tend to overlap and act synergistically.<sup>84</sup> Analysts have struggled to conceptualise the tensions and relationships between political and criminal actors over the last two decades, and consensus in this area is still emerging.<sup>85</sup>

In the 1990s, this dichotomy was a key element within the ‘greed or grievance’ debate. The debate was sparked by the surge of interest in the economics of intrastate war, as it became clear in the post-Cold War era that such conflicts were able to become self-financing despite

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<sup>81</sup> For a critique of utility as an incentive for violence, see Chenoweth and Lawrence (2010), 15-16; Pearlman (2010), 251.

<sup>82</sup> International Crisis Group (2003), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Williams (1994), 96.

<sup>84</sup> McMullin (2009); Smith (2005), 33-34; Mitchell (2010); Tadjbakhsh (2008), 34.

<sup>85</sup> For a good overview of the key debates within the political economy of conflict field, see Ballentine and Nitzschke (2005).

the drawdown in superpower proxy funding, thanks to new illicit sources of support.<sup>86</sup> Most notably, Paul Collier and others within the World Bank utilised quantitative models to advance their argument that civil wars could be more accurately attributed to motivations based on greed than on political or ideological grievances.<sup>87</sup> This elevation of greed as an explanatory variable – one which emphasised criminal aims and organisation – was not persuasive to many other political economists and development specialists with years of experience in the field. They found the quantitative formulae upon which it rested problematic and saw much more evidence of ‘grievance’ than such models allowed for.<sup>88</sup> For example, David Keen, a prominent critic of the Collier approach, demonstrated that Sierra Leonean rebels – one of the exemplars for ‘greed’ theorists – had additional political and social grievances which helped fuel their aims and behaviour.<sup>89</sup> Critics also emphasised the interdependence of economic and political power within conflict states that makes separating motivations difficult.<sup>90</sup> In addition, more nuanced studies emerged that considered the characteristics of the economic assets at stake and their varying impacts on conflict onset and duration; these suggested that the presence of lootable resources such as narcotics tended to lengthen but not cause conflicts.<sup>91</sup> Within a decade of the debate’s emergence, the question of greed or grievance had been largely ‘laid to rest’, with general agreement within the field that both factors were critical to understanding armed conflict.<sup>92</sup> This dissertation thus draws more heavily upon more recent efforts to grapple with the complexities of war economies, such as Jonathan Goodhand’s useful typology of combat, shadow and coping economies within conflict environments.<sup>93</sup>

Following the 9/11 attacks, there was an expanded interest in the ‘crime-terror nexus’.<sup>94</sup> This body of work facilitated typologies and approaches that could cope with the challenges posed by such actors as the FARC and the PKK, which were heavily involved in the drugs trade whilst also fighting long-running insurgencies.<sup>95</sup> One of the most influential conceptualisations, by Tamara Makarenko, was based in the Central Asian context:

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<sup>86</sup> Makarenko (2004) offers a good overview of this evolution. See however Naylor (1993) on the use of criminality for funding by non-state actors during the Cold War era, and the argument that superpower funding for such groups has been generally overstated.

<sup>87</sup> See in particular Collier and Hoeffler (2000).

<sup>88</sup> For critiques of the ‘greed thesis’, see: Ballentine and Nitzschke (2003); Berdal (2004); McMullin (2009); Murshed and Tadjoeddin (2007); Yanacopulos and Hanlon (2006), Chapter 7; Cornell (2005a), 752.

<sup>89</sup> Keen (2008), 8, 32. See also Keen (2005).

<sup>90</sup> Ballentine and Nitzschke (2003), 13.

<sup>91</sup> An exception in this category is alluvial diamonds. See Le Billon (2001); Ross (2004), 344-46; Fearon (2004), 284.

<sup>92</sup> Wennmann (2011), 335; Center on International Cooperation (2011), 5-6.

<sup>93</sup> Goodhand (2004).

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Makarenko (2004); Dishman (2001); Williams (2006); Jackson (2005).

<sup>95</sup> Cornell (2005b), 624-25. See also Cornell (2005a) for an excellent review essay of the conflict-narcotics nexus literature.



*[T]he term 'crime-terror nexus' refers to a security continuum with traditional organised crime on one end of the spectrum and terrorism at the other. In the middle of the spectrum is a 'gray area' – where organised crime and terrorism are indistinguishable from one another.<sup>96</sup>*

This body of work has contributed substantially to an improved conceptualisation of hybrid groups but has several drawbacks: 1) such works often prioritise the 'logistical nexus' between criminal and terrorist groups and neglect the 'gray area' and the symbiotic infrastructure of crime and terrorism that can emerge within conflict zones; 2) the field has been dominated by studies of 'narco-terrorism', obscuring the many other forms of hybrid criminal-terrorist activity as well as the 'state-crime nexus'; and 3) sweeping conclusions tend to be made on the basis of very little observable data.<sup>97</sup> There is considerable consensus in the literature, for example, that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was heavily, perhaps even primarily, involved in narco-trafficking prior to its near-elimination in 2001 – yet there is virtually no data to support this view.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, the apparent hybrid nature of many armed groups today suggests the need for a more holistic approach. This is further encouraged by Keen's challenging of the 'breakdown' paradigm within civil war analysis. The 'messy' and ill-defined conflicts that emerged after the Cold War were seen by many as representative of a complete breakdown of order, rather than a transformation into an alternative order. However, by approaching the political and economic relationships in a society *systemically*, and considering the cost-benefit motivations of actors in such a wartime system, a less dichotomous and more nuanced view of conflict emerges:

*Rather than listing the causes of war or famine and rather than portraying war as fundamentally irrational or as an aberration or interruption, it would be more helpful to investigate how violence is generated by particular patterns of development, by particular political economies which violence in turn modifies (but does not destroy). Indeed, part of the problem in much existing analysis is that conflict is regarded as, simply, a breakdown in a*

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<sup>96</sup> Makarenko (2002), 1.

<sup>97</sup> Shelley, et al. (2005), 17; Mitchell (2010); De Danieli (2011), 130; Jackson (2005), 44-46.

<sup>98</sup> For accounts linking the IMU to the drugs trade, see: Engvall (2006), 837; Jackson (2005), 45; Cornell (2005b), 629; Makarenko (2002); Madi (2004). See De Danieli (2011), 130, for a critique of this argument.

*particular system, rather than as the emergence of another, alternative system of profit, power and even protection.*<sup>99</sup>

This approach to the context of civil war facilitates a more holistic view of non-state armed groups; it allows us to think of them as *conflict actors*, broadly speaking, without needing to pigeonhole them as either political or criminal actors.<sup>100</sup> This approach to non-state armed groups appears more useful in engaging with real-world case studies than frameworks which ghetto-ise criminal groups to the detriment of better understanding of conflict dynamics.

In engaging with the political economy of conflict literature, two opposing pitfalls loom large. First, some scholars may be tempted to over-emphasise the criminal aspects of war – even to the extent of considering war little more than a criminal endeavour. This is particularly likely in conflicts where criminality is overt and highly visible whilst conventional military activity is limited. Mueller, for example, reduces the Bosnian conflict to ‘the actions of apolitical bands of opportunistic loot-seekers’.<sup>101</sup> At the other extreme, however, many scholars simply ignore even obvious manifestations of criminality in the modern international system. There exists

*...a more general tendency for international relations scholars to shy away from scrutinizing the ‘covert world’ and the illicit dimensions of the global economy. Smugglers, arms traffickers, and criminals-turned-combatants are typically not treated as central players – strikingly apparent by the virtual absence of these actors from the pages of the leading journals in the field.*<sup>102</sup>

This dissertation aims to navigate between these extreme stances by considering the economic and criminal aspects of the war in depth, whilst not reducing the entire Tajik conflict to the pursuit of illicit wealth.

### **1.4.3 The Tajik Civil War**

The Tajik civil war remains largely under-examined by scholars: a literature review in 2011 noted that ‘few detailed studies of the war have emerged and book-length analyses of the events of the war are only available in Russian’.<sup>103</sup> Heathershaw further noted, ‘There is no

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<sup>99</sup> Keen (2008), 15. This is sometimes referred to as a ‘functionalist’ approach; see Ballentine and Nitzschke (2005), 3.

<sup>100</sup> Kaldor (2007), 113; McMullin (2009), 78.

<sup>101</sup> Mueller (2000). This characterisation is specifically refuted in Andreas (2008).

<sup>102</sup> Andreas (2008), 15-16.

<sup>103</sup> Heathershaw and Herzig (2011), 10.

single authoritative account of the civil war; there are no open academic or political debates over the whys and wherefores. Most of the military battles, human costs and social and political implications are partially known or overlooked'.<sup>104</sup>

There are several possible reasons for this gap in the literature. First, the field of Central Asian experts who might contribute such analysis was relatively small during its occurrence and remains limited today, relevant to other regional specialisations. Second, the geographical remoteness of the country and its varieties of political repression and censorship inhibited reportage of the conflict as well as subsequent academic fieldwork, leaving few primary sources to plunder (in 1994, the Committee to Protect Journalists named Tajikistan 'the most dangerous country in the world for journalists').<sup>105</sup> As Shirin Akiner noted in 2001, 'There is as yet no authoritative account of the Tajik civil war. This is largely because there are almost no first-hand reports of the conflict'.<sup>106</sup> Analysis of the war, as in this dissertation, requires a painstaking piecing together of data from a large number of partially salient sources.

Third, the Tajik war in a certain sense lacks a clear representative narrative that makes it relevant to a broader scholarly and public audience. The Balkan wars served as an effective crucible for post-Cold War anxieties about 'neo-tribalism' and the future role of Western security organisations, and offered a useful paradigm for illustrating the crux of the primordialist interpretation of ethnic conflict.<sup>107</sup> Wars in West and Central Africa, portrayed as Hobbesian conflicts with sickening levels of brutality, were invoked to illustrate 'new wars' and fundamental shifts in the character of warfare, as well as the rising challenges to the very concept of the nation-state.<sup>108</sup> In contrast, the Tajik war did not feature a dominant ethnic component (most of the violence was Tajik-Tajik) and its remoteness served to mask in-depth reporting or analysis of the high level of atrocities that did occur. It did emblemise conflict in the former Soviet republics, but suffered from the attention given to conflicts in the Caucasus that better conveyed ethnic rivalries and Russian intervention in its new 'near abroad' (the outbreak of conflict in Dushanbe in May 1992 coincided with a coup in Azerbaijan, Armenian military victories in Nagorno-Karabakh, armed clashes in Georgia, and separatist entrenchment in Trans-Dniestr, Moldova).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Heathershaw (2011), 1.

<sup>105</sup> US Department of State (1995); Burkharter testimony (1994); BBC/Ostankino, 11/9/92; BBC/Mayak, 7/5/93; *Washington Post*, 24/10/94; AP, 27/10/94; AFP, 1/5/96.

<sup>106</sup> Akiner (2001), 37.

<sup>107</sup> Yanacopoulos and Hanlon (2006), 97; Semelin (2005), 12.

<sup>108</sup> See Kaldor (1999); van Creveld (1991).

<sup>109</sup> These events were often packaged and framed as of a piece, despite significantly divergent local dynamics. *Washington Post*, 11/5/92; *Toronto Star*, 17/5/92; *New York Times*, 24/5/92.

Nevertheless, there does exist a body of literature concerned specifically with the Tajik war, primarily located within the field of Central Asian studies. This literature benefits from a substantial degree of consensus as to the causes and character of the war, although some debate exists with regard to specific aspects of its participants.

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of conflict, a host of explanations for the war emerged.<sup>110</sup> Of these, the binary configurations of 'communists vs. Islamo-democrats' or 'hardliners vs. reformers' were amongst the most popular. Whilst not wholly incorrect, they do not adequately capture the oppositional dynamics that occurred during the war, which went beyond broad political loyalties.

Analysts today largely agree that the Tajik war was fuelled by competition amongst regional elites for power and resources in the context of an evaporating Soviet political apparatus and devastating economic collapse.<sup>111</sup> Specifically, elites from the Leninabad region, who had dominated the communist regime for decades, fell into confrontation with elites from other areas of the republic that had been historically marginalised. Strong regional identities and network structures allowed these competing elites to mobilise armed supporters at the local level and disperse communal violence beyond the capital. Kilavuz refers to this process as 'network activation', a useful conceptualisation given the strong, regionally based patronage networks that were engaged.<sup>112</sup> (Abdullaev, in another helpful interpretation, presents it as the 'ruralisation' of the conflict.<sup>113</sup>)

It is important to emphasise, however, that regional differences did not lead to conflict in and of themselves; rather, they shaped the terms of competition and the mobilisation of violent actors.<sup>114</sup> There was little overt enmity amongst people of different regional origin before the war. However, the desperate scarcities caused by Soviet disintegration created a climate of competition that facilitated conflict between rival regional networks.<sup>115</sup> Demographic factors – in particular, the Tajik 'youth bulge' – also affected competition and the mobilisation of violence but remain relatively unexamined in the literature.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1105.

<sup>111</sup> See: Atkin (1997), 278; Nourzhanov (2005), 111; Rubin (1993), 71; Shirazi (1997), 618; Roy (2007), 48; Tadjbakhsh (2008), 7; Kuzmin (2001), 192; Heathershaw (2011), 21; Lubin, et al. (1999), 19; Abdullaev and Barnes (2001), 8; Ruesch (1994), 2.

<sup>112</sup> Kilavuz (2009b). See also Rubin (1998), 149.

<sup>113</sup> Abdullaev and Freizer (2003), 10.

<sup>114</sup> This is in line with the role of identity variables in other conflicts; see Mueller (2004), 94; Kalyvas (2006), 74-83.

<sup>115</sup> The role of scarcity in driving the war is especially emphasised by Olivier Roy, for example in Roy (1997), 146. See also Kuzmin (2001), 192-93. In this respect, Tajikistan fits well into modern conflict models that focus on identity-group competition for resources in the context of weak or evaporating state structures; see, for example, Kaldor (2007), 81-82.

<sup>116</sup> An exception is Roche (2010). See also Akiner (2001), 26.

Within this broad consensus – from which this dissertation does not depart – scholars do prioritise certain variables. For example, Rubin gives weight to the ‘breakdown of social control’ and ‘generalised insecurity into which the collapse of Soviet institutions threw so much of the population’.<sup>117</sup> Both Akiner and Kilavuz stress the factors beyond regionalism that helped construct the critical elite networks – such as education, career and personal relationships – as well as the fact that at the beginning of the conflict there were significant factional splits within each region.<sup>118</sup> Lynch focuses on Tajikistan’s weak national identity and the struggle to define the newly independent state within the broader factional competition for power.<sup>119</sup> In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation, and noting that it is concerned primarily with the conduct of the war and not its causes, I do not argue for the prioritisation of any one explanation over another. Instead, Chapter 2 examines the full range of suggested conflict drivers and causal variables in order to holistically examine the factors that shaped and organised the conduct of the war.

Given the prominent role of regional and other sub-state identities, one might expect the literature to dabble in debates over identity conflict theory. Instead, virtually all the notable scholars of Tajikistan reject primordialist theories of identity conflict and promote explanations that fall into the instrumentalist or situational approaches, arguing that identities were manipulated by elites and/or that conditions of insecurity drove people to identify more strongly with available solidarity networks.<sup>120</sup>

However, one main point of dispute within the literature concerns the nature of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP), a key actor in the conflict. First, there is some debate on whether Tajik Islamists were genuine in their desire for a more Islamicised society and state, or whether political Islam served as an effective rallying cry, identity-building mechanism, and vehicle for political and cultural opposition to an officially atheist regime.<sup>121</sup> Tadjbakhsh, for example, stated at the time of the conflict that ‘political Islam is an artificial, reactionary symbol that unifies all those dissatisfied with 70 years of Communist rule’.<sup>122</sup> Others believed that the IRP played up its Islamist credentials whilst in exile in northern Afghanistan in order to attract funding and arms from sponsors in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Rubin (1998), 142, 153.

<sup>118</sup> Kilavuz (2009a), 324; Akiner (2009), 369 and (2001), 18-21.

<sup>119</sup> Lynch (2001), 51-52.

<sup>120</sup> See Rubin (1998), 144-46, for an overview of these approaches applied to Tajikistan. See also Rubin (1993), 78; Heathershaw (2011), 22; Akbarzadeh (1996), 1126.

<sup>121</sup> On the appeal of Islamism to newly independent Central Asian Muslims, see Olcott (1994), 152.

<sup>122</sup> *New York Times*, 5/11/93. See also Lubin, et al. (1999), 25.

<sup>123</sup> Inter-Press Service, 7/9/94.

However, given the difficulty in assessing the validity of stated political preferences on the part of individuals, this is a generally irresolvable debate. Naumkin, for one, concludes that ‘Islam was used instrumentally for political mobilisation *and* as a genuine system of values and concepts around which some groups of the population rallied’.<sup>124</sup>

Second, whilst there appears to be considerable consensus that the IRP was and remains a moderate Islamist actor with limited aims, this analysis may be skewed by hindsight in view of the IRP’s participation in the postwar government and substantial scaling down of its Islamist rhetoric.<sup>125</sup> Scholars writing in the mid-1990s, before the formal conclusion of the war, appeared less certain; and some – perhaps not coincidentally, comprising mostly Russian scholars – identified the IRP as radical fundamentalists aiming to set Central Asia aflame and threatening the soft underbelly of the Russian state.<sup>126</sup>

This divergence in the literature may be partly due to different interpretations of the spectrum of Islamic activism. Matveeva and Kuzmin, for example, refer to IRP members as ‘Wahhabis’ whilst Rubin (amongst others) states that Wahhabism, as such, did not have a presence in Tajikistan.<sup>127</sup> The erroneous attribution of Wahhabism to Islamist actors in the former Soviet sphere is commonplace.

*It would hardly be any exaggeration to say that virtually all articles devoted to regional wars in the Muslim regions of the former USSR mention the so-called Wahhabis... But, in reality, equating the terms ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘Wahhabi’ is fundamentally wrong (the first concept is considerably broader). As Bushkov and Mikulskiy, authors of the [Russian-language] book ‘History of the Civil War in Tajikistan’, observe, the basis of the directive stratum of the Tajik opposition is composed of natives of the distinguished Central Asian Ishan class – leaders of the Sufi fraternal orders. From the Wahhabis’ viewpoint, devotion to Sufism contravenes the canons of Islam; consequently, the Tajik opposition cannot be considered Wahhabis.*<sup>128</sup>

Essentially, regimes in Russia and the former Soviet republics used the term ‘Wahhabi’ to refer

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<sup>124</sup> Naumkin (2005), 35. Emphasis added.

<sup>125</sup> Interviews (IFES, AUCA), Bishkek, 2008. For example, Roy, Rubin, Akiner, Heathershaw and Naumkin all refer to the IRP as a moderate Islamist actor.

<sup>126</sup> For example, Kuzmin (2001); Makhamov (1994). See also Russian scholars quoted in: *New York Times*, 7/11/93; *Washington Post*, 24/10/94; *Washington Post*, 6/6/95. See also Heathershaw (2005), 25.

<sup>127</sup> Matveeva (2009), 9; Kuzmin (2001), 178; Rubin (1993), 78; Lubin, et al. (1999), 24.

<sup>128</sup> BBC/Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 20/8/98.

to non-establishment Islamic figures who might undermine or threaten the status quo.<sup>129</sup> It was not applied on the basis of a reasoned analysis of the religious beliefs of such Islamic leaders, but rather generated by political fears and reflexive discriminatory approaches (or, as Akiner says, it was 'intended to convey disdain rather than to give an accurate description of their beliefs'.<sup>130</sup>) Thus, characterisations of the Tajik Islamist opposition that invoke the 'Wahhabi' label must be treated with a fair bit of scepticism.

Nevertheless, one factor contributing to consensus within the literature on the Tajik civil war may be its overall focus on the political aspects of the conflict, and in particular on the diplomatic efforts surrounding peace negotiations from 1994 to 1997. Indeed, the peace process is perhaps the most well-covered aspect of the Tajik civil war: the heavy international involvement in negotiations produced a wealth of reports on diplomatic efforts and well-documented meetings, thereby facilitating research and analysis. (Given this already extant and excellent pool of research, this dissertation only briefly covers the peace process in Chapter 3.)

With few exceptions, the literature does not delve deeply into the military and strategic dimensions of the conflict, beyond brief summaries of the intense war-fighting of 1992 and particularly violent attacks within the insurgency that followed. This is, in fact, one of the more striking aspects of the Tajik civil war literature – the near-uniformity with which most scholars follow a pattern of detailing the events of 1992, mentioning the beginnings of guerrilla warfare in 1993, noting the deaths of 25 Russian border guards in July of that year, and then shifting to the diplomatic arena and the launch of peace talks in 1994. All acknowledge that the conflict continued from 1993 to 1997, but military developments during these years are generally summed up very briefly, obscuring the significant variations in violence that occurred both geographically and over time. For example, the fact that the conflict fell into a relative lull in 1995 before a significant escalation in violence in 1996 is usually glossed over, as are the relative oscillations in war-fighting activity at the Tajik-Afghan border and in the mountain valleys of eastern Tajikistan. This curious conformity in the scope of analysis likely contributes to the general sense of consensus regarding the war, as more thorough analysis of these aspects might reveal more significant analytical divergence. It also necessitates the use of additional, contemporary media sources for analysis of the military aspects of the war, as discussed in Section 1.3.

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<sup>129</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 101; *Moscow Times*, 31/8/94; BBC/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20/8/98.

<sup>130</sup> Akiner (2001), 29.

Finally, with respect to the subject of this dissertation's case study, there is an extremely limited amount of information on the PFT within the scholarly literature on Tajikistan, and virtually no primary sources attributable to the group itself. There are no full-length scholarly publications devoted solely to the PFT; at most, the group tends to receive a few paragraphs within treatments of the civil war in full. Put together, they provide a basic account of the group's activities, but in order to fully analyse the PFT and its wartime behaviour this case study has relied more heavily upon contemporary media accounts and government and NGO reports. All of these sources have been carefully examined for purposes of credibility, and discrepancies noted. The resulting case study thus represents a major contribution to the literature on the Tajik civil war.

In short, this dissertation has been undertaken with a full appreciation of the serious lacunae in the scholarship related to both civilian victimisation and the Tajik civil war, but with confidence that the utilisation of a wide range of primary and secondary sources and the construction of new analytical frameworks serve to compensate for these evidentiary difficulties.

Having presented the aims and methods of this dissertation, I now turn to the first step in the strategic approach: an appraisal of the strategic environment within which the PFT and other conflict actors operated during the Tajik civil war.



## CHAPTER 2

### UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE IN THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR: THE DRIVERS OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The Tajik civil war does not fit neatly into the familiar tropes of internecine conflict. It was neither a grand ideological confrontation nor an impassioned struggle for secession. It was not a superpower proxy war or a genocidal ethnic slaughter. Most intriguingly, it was not a binary conflict between a central state military and a rebellious non-state group: the Tajik regime did not have time to assemble a coherent armed force in the brief period between independence and open warfare, and thus the civil war featured a ragged cast of pro-regime militias, opposition guerrilla forces, foreign jihadis, Russian and Uzbek army units, Central Asian peacekeepers, and UN monitors and negotiators. In this sense, the Tajik civil war was more akin to wars of the decolonisation era – logically enough, given the parallels between the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of European colonialism.<sup>131</sup>

The aim of this dissertation is not simply to record the events of the Tajik civil war, but to understand its complex patterns of violence and the incentives for conflict actors to participate in transgressive and possibly counterproductive activities. The strategic approach requires analysis not just of an actor's behaviour but of its environment and the intangible influences that shape strategic decision-making. Thus, as a first step, this chapter elaborates seven structural and historical factors that organised and shaped the violence perpetrated by the Popular Front of Tajikistan and other non-state armed forces during the civil war. These factors helped construct the strategic environment within which the war occurred, and were a primary determinant in how the PFT interpreted and responded to the ongoing strategic discourse throughout the conflict. They are: physical terrain and infrastructure; the Soviet structural and societal legacy; Tajik social structures; Tajik regionalism; Islam and Islamism; the military, political and economic transformations of the 1980s; and the emergence of the Kulyabi mafia.

#### 2.1 Physical Terrain and Infrastructure

Tajikistan's unusual topography – more than 90 per cent of the land is mountainous, and only 7 per cent is arable – has facilitated the development of distinct regions, often physically

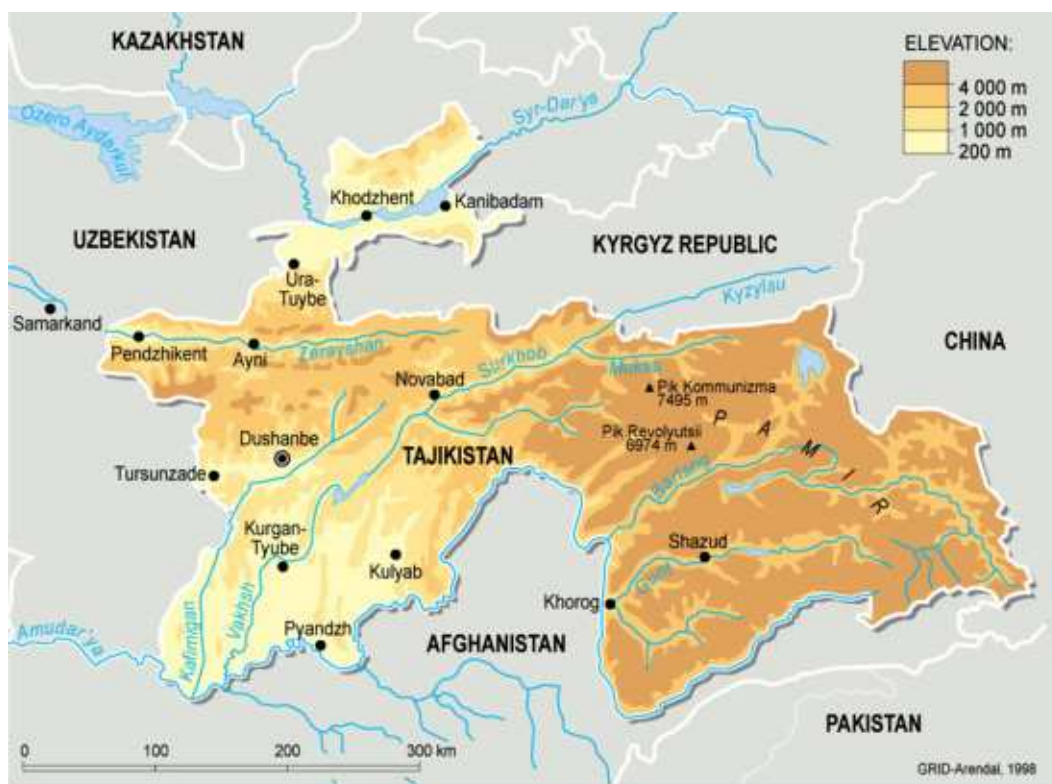
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<sup>131</sup> Heathershaw (2011), 25. For discussion of whether decolonisation is a useful paradigm for analysing the Tajik experience, see Matveeva (2009), 13.

separate from each other, with varying levels and types of socioeconomic development and historically a 'low level of contact' between them.<sup>132</sup> Akiner notes that '28 [mountain] ranges slice the country into a patchwork of isolated (or at best semi-isolated) areas of habitation', whilst Olimova discusses the prominence of regional 'gorge identities' over other types of identity – including national identity – for most Tajiks.<sup>133</sup>

In addition, Tajik frontiers are not coterminous with the Central Asian population of Tajiks: at the time of independence in 1991, 62 percent of Tajikistan's population of 5.1 million people were classified as Tajik while 23 percent were Uzbek (concentrated in areas contiguous to the Republic of Uzbekistan); millions of Tajiks lived across the borders in Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan.<sup>134</sup> This dispersion of the primary national affiliation impeded efforts to create a singular national identity post-1991 and contributed to the cross-border migration of conflict during the civil war.

**Map 2.1. Tajikistan Topography**<sup>135</sup>



<sup>132</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1105; Lewis (2008), 166.

<sup>133</sup> Akiner (2001), 5; Olimova (1999), 1.

<sup>134</sup> Figures based on 1989 Soviet census, cited in Auten (1996), 200, and many other works; the IMF later estimated Tajikistan's population at the end of 1991 to be 5.5 million.

<sup>135</sup> Source: Philippe Rekacewicz/Emmanuelle Bournay, UNEP/GRID-Arendal. Accessed January 2012 at: [http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map\\_ea9b](http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/tajikistan-topographic-map_ea9b)

The topography of the Tajik republic had a significant impact on patterns of violence during the civil war. Terrain-delineated solidarity groupings shaped the terms of political conflict and enabled the mobilisation of local militias, which made up the bulk of combatants during the war. The mostly mountainous terrain had the effect of funnelling the conflict into key valleys (Vakhsh, Hissar and Karategin) and flatlands (Kurgan-Tyube). It prevented conflict from spreading into other areas, notably Leninabad (which was easily sealed off behind the Zarafshan mountain range). The mountains also helped conceal opposition bases in eastern Tajikistan as well as the supply routes between these bases and northern Afghanistan. Finally, the small amount of arable land has led to high population density in parts of the republic, making it possible to inflict significant human and physical damage even within a relatively small area.

The physical terrain facilitated strategies of civilian victimisation in several instances. The opposition was able to impose a 'blockade' on the Kulyab region in part because it was already largely cut off from its allies by mountain ranges with few good roads.<sup>136</sup> The Amu Darya river on the southern border (known historically as the Oxus, and locally as the Pyanj) inhibited the flight of civilians from ethnic cleansing operations carried out by the PFT. In the east, tens of thousands of civilians suffered from malnutrition, disease and cold for long periods due to the sheer inaccessibility of the Pamir region to outside aid. Finally, the lengthy border with Afghanistan led to Tajikistan becoming a key transit state for the narcotics trade, which as described in Chapter 4 had a range of deleterious effects on the Tajik population.

All actors in the civil war faced serious disadvantages due to the relatively limited scale of transport and communications infrastructure in the Tajik republic (a function of the difficult terrain). Most notably, few roads connected the warring regions and the capital, which limited the movement of armed forces and allowed actors to impose blockades with a minimum application of resources.<sup>137</sup> The roads that did exist were often blocked by snow from October to March, leading to a seasonal pattern of fighting during the guerrilla warfare phase of the conflict. Communication between cities and villages was easily shut off as well, impeding coordination between actors and encouraging the proliferation of rumours. Many of the rumours featured tales of atrocities, which contributed to demonisation of the enemy and attacks upon civilians.

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<sup>136</sup> Akiner (2001), p. 6

<sup>137</sup> Lynch (2001), 53.

The combination of the mountainous terrain and limited infrastructure combined to make the conflict a heavily localised one. Nourzhanov notes that in the Vakhsh raion, 94 per cent of the militants killed were near their place of birth or residence.<sup>138</sup> It can be argued that this sort of localisation facilitated strategies of civilian victimisation for two reasons: 1) a focus on local targets, in heavily rural Tajikistan, would inevitably mean civilian targets, as few military and government targets existed; 2) local actors would face fewer problems with distinction, and could easily identify civilians associated with the enemy.

## 2.2 The Structural and Societal Impact of Sovietisation

Lying astride the path of mass nomadic invasions (the Huns, Turks and Mongols), competing imperial incursions (the Persians, Arabs and Russians) and valuable trading routes between Europe and China, the territory comprising modern-day Tajikistan has been subjected to many forms of dynastic rule. Some elements of continuity remain, including Persian culture and language, bequeathed by some of its earliest rulers and centralised in the great civilisational cities of Bukhara and Samarkand; and Islam, which arrived in the region alongside seventh-century Arab invaders. The inhabitants of the region commingled culturally and linguistically beneath the political machinations of these various dynasties; as Roy notes, 'The idea of associating a territory with an ethnic group defined by language was alien to the political ideas of the Muslims of Central Asia'.<sup>139</sup>

Russian tsarist expansion between 1868 and 1876 – part of the 'Great Game' waged between Russia and Great Britain in Central Asia – gradually enveloped the three Uzbek-ruled emirates of Kokand, Bukhara and Khiva. This area was a prime battleground during the Russian civil war of 1918-20 but eventually Bolshevik forces triumphed (although local *basmachi* militias convened a guerrilla war against them throughout the 1920s). The Soviet Tajik republic – commonly thought to be 'the most artificial Soviet construct in Central Asia' – was pieced together from the former territories of the Kokand and Bukharan Emirates.<sup>140</sup> Soviet demarcation of borders in Central Asia (known as the 'national delimitation') aimed to forestall the emergence of potentially powerful pan-Turkic movements by creating a patchwork of Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz territories in the Ferghana Valley and surrounding area. This left Tajikistan awkwardly shaped and deprived of the major centres of Tajik civilisation and learning (in particular, Bukhara and Samarkand, which were located in the new republic of

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<sup>138</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 128.

<sup>139</sup> Roy (2007), 3. See also: Rubin (1993), 75; Atkin (1997b), 280; Bennigsen (1985), 92; Heathershaw (2011), 21; Rubin (1998), 135-39.

<sup>140</sup> Akiner (2001), 2.

Uzbekistan).<sup>141</sup> This loss left most of the Tajik intelligentsia outside of the territory of their new 'homeland', inhibiting the development of a 'Tajik identity'.<sup>142</sup>

The Soviet impact upon Tajikistan was immense. All of the trappings of the modern nation-state – government structures, political parties, administrative processes, rigid borders, a nation-based identity – originated in the Soviet era. Moscow also held to an unrelenting course in which Tajikistan provided raw materials – in particular, cotton and aluminium – to be processed elsewhere in the Soviet Union, keeping the overall state of development and industrialisation within the country to low levels and ensuring environmental degradation in the long run. These economic policies would have significant repercussions later in the century, as they led to internal migrations that would fuel future grievances.

The negative political and economic effects of Sovietisation were accompanied by significant social improvements as well. Soviet modernisation greatly improved access to education, health care, transport and new economic markets. In the countryside, residents benefited from rural electrification and communications projects. The positive side of these changes was a more literate, healthy, mobile and economically engaged Tajik citizenry.<sup>143</sup> The downside – in addition to ongoing political repression and forced migration – was the creation of a society kept in a state of 'extreme dependency' by the comprehensive provision of the accoutrements of modern existence by the Soviet system.<sup>144</sup> In addition, comparative inequalities fostered resentment in the regions that did not always receive such modernising largesse (such as the Karategin Valley).<sup>145</sup> These grievances would help mobilise opposition movements and militias in the post-independence era.

The Soviet era also saw the solidification of strong regional identities, which would later contribute to the outbreak of war. The imposition of collectivisation reinforced local, clan-like allegiances, as traditional affiliations revolving around a village or extended family were subsumed within the new communist entity of the 'kolkhoz', or collective farm.<sup>146</sup> As Naumkin writes, '[O]n the one hand the kolkhoz, 'as a new tribe', was an attempt at modernization of traditional social networks and structures, replacing them with new, territory-based ones; but on the other it fostered their preservation and social perpetuation, rather than their

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<sup>141</sup> Auten (1996), 200; Shirazi (1997), 612.

<sup>142</sup> Urban intelligentsia are a prime vector for the creation of 'nationalist' sentiments. Roy (2007), 124; Kuzmin (2001), 175. A Tajik elite began to develop in Dushanbe but was then largely eliminated in the purges of 1937-38.

<sup>143</sup> Akiner (2009), 342-43; Lubin, et al. (1999), 42.

<sup>144</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 32-33.

<sup>145</sup> AP, 23/1/93.

<sup>146</sup> Akbarzadeh (2006), 1107. See also Rubin (1998), 147.

destruction'.<sup>147</sup> Each kolkhoz, to a large extent, was a 'self-contained social unit', and it was not uncommon for neighbouring kolkhozes to have minimal contact with each other.<sup>148</sup> In the context of forced internal migration during the Soviet era – during which entire kolkhozes were relocated to different regions – this 'froze' local identities in a way that facilitated communal clashes during the civil war.

In sum, Sovietisation structured the Tajik republic in ways that would facilitate the outbreak of war and the organisation of violence along regional lines, and its administrative treatment of certain regional 'clans' would create the conditions for grievance and demonisation that fuelled civilian victimisation during the war.

### 2.3 Tajik Social Structures

Tajikistan remained a largely rural society; only 32 per cent of the population lived in urban areas in 1990.<sup>149</sup> Those Tajiks allowed by the Soviet authorities to migrate to the cities typically brought rural social structures with them. Thus, the social organisation of the countryside – in both its traditional and Soviet forms – had an outsize impact on collective and individual affiliations and relationships throughout the entire republic. Further, the organisation of Tajik society – particularly rural society – had key implications for the response of communities to the breakdown of the state and the mobilisation of rural populations for war.

The most important basis of Tajik affiliation has traditionally been the *avlod*, or extended family: a 'kinship/patronymic group' of hierarchically organised blood relatives, headed (usually) by a male leader and linked to a particular locale.<sup>150</sup> Avlods were a key element of the regional patronage networks that formed the foundation of Tajik political, economic and social life during the Soviet era. When the civil war began, the rapid mobilisation of rural populations was accomplished largely via avlod social structures:

*The Tajik scholars Saodat and Muzaffar Olimovy consider the avlod structure to be one of the main drivers of mobilisation for fighting during the conflict. According to their interviews with former war participants,*

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<sup>147</sup> Naumkin (2005), 205. See also Roy (2007), 86-96.

<sup>148</sup> Akbarzadeh (2006), 1107.

<sup>149</sup> Matveeva (2009), 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Bennigsen (1985), 89; Wiegmann (2009), 147; Rubin (1998), 147; Matveeva (2009), 10; Naumkin (2005), 204.

*many fought because they were prompted by the avlod leaders and had little or no sense of the politics behind the fighting.*<sup>151</sup>

As emphasised by Akiner, however, it would be a mistake to characterise the conflict as a battle *between* avlods; they were a 'conduit for mobilizing group action'.<sup>152</sup>

*Gaps* and *gashtaks* represent another key social affiliation in Tajik life. They are social networks for male Tajiks, based on professional, educational or other connections. During the Soviet era these traditional solidarity groups also helped patronage systems function and were a key mechanism for transmitting information through society.<sup>153</sup> And, like the avlod structure, they facilitated mobilisation during the war – in particular, the mobilisation of criminal elements.

These solidarity networks based on family and profession operate within the collective social institution known as the *mahalla*, or neighbourhood; a typical village, or *kishlak*, might have one or several, whilst in urban areas a mahalla might encompass but a single street.<sup>154</sup>

Mahallas aim to be largely self-regulating, with a leader who settles disputes and organises help for those in need. Whilst they serve as effective forms of local governance, mahallas also reinforce a tendency toward localism in social affiliations, and fail to 'provide sufficient incentives for common national or interregional collaboration'.<sup>155</sup> Rural residents who moved to cities tended to settle along mahalla and village patterns brought along from the countryside. These also facilitated mobilisation when conflict broke out.<sup>156</sup>

In sum, the types of traditional social structures still existing in Tajikistan at the time of independence played a key role in shaping participation in civil war violence, as group loyalties were the primary mechanism for mobilising and organising the use of violence during the war.

## 2.4 Tajik Regions and Regionalism

Tajik regional divisions, whilst heavily influenced by physical terrain, are more than simply geographical affiliations. Over time, the accretion of divergent political, socioeconomic and religious trends lent characteristics to each region that superseded those of mere territory. In

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<sup>151</sup> Matveeva (2009), 11. Solidarity networks also played a pre-eminent role in mobilisation during the 1920s *basmachi* rebellion. Roy (2007), 48.

<sup>152</sup> Akiner (2001), 42.

<sup>153</sup> Kilavuz (2009a), 331; Matveeva (2009), 10.

<sup>154</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 173-77. Kishlaks may be independent, or function as subdivisions of a larger kolkhoz. Rubin (1998), 133.

<sup>155</sup> Slim and Hodizoda (2002), 9.

<sup>156</sup> Roy (2007), 19.

addition, regionalism became a decisive organising principle during the war not solely because of individual affinity for particular normative identities, but because of the development of powerful, regionally and locally based patronage networks immersed in the administrative infrastructure that accompanied Soviet collectivisation policies. Tajiks, like other Central Asians,

*predominantly identified himself/herself with a place, kolkhoz, sovkhos or any other work group rather than his/her national features. Each of these units had their own leaders who controlled the distribution of subsidies given by Moscow. Thus, territorial identities were also patronage networks competing for resources.*<sup>157</sup>

Kolkhoz directors – who in pre-Soviet times would have been ‘rural notables’ – formed the linchpins of patronage networks, by distributing resources to those under their authority whilst also building and maintaining relationships with their party and government superiors.<sup>158</sup> They played a key role at the outbreak of war, as they were able to quickly mobilise kolkhoz residents on behalf of a particular elite faction.

These types of patronage networks were common throughout the Soviet Union (despite being officially condemned as ‘nepotism’ or ‘clientalism’) and to a large extent enabled the Communist system to function, particularly in the less developed republics.<sup>159</sup> The phenomenon was particularly pronounced in Central Asia, however, as administrative patronage was reinforced by familial ties (i.e., avlod structures) as well. Over time, these networks would develop into something that could be referred to as a ‘clan’ – not in the usual sense of an extended family grouping, linked to a singular primordial ancestor, but as a way of connoting a hybrid network of professional and familial ties, centred on a particular geographical area.<sup>160</sup> For example, the so-called ‘Leninabadi clan’ included avlods as well as people unrelated to each other, who all derived their status and income from the same structures of governance and wealth in Leninabad.

Regional identities were also sharpened by the region-based competition for resources throughout the Soviet era. Benefits and resources were centrally distributed from Moscow and Dushanbe, and deprived communities had little autonomy to generate their own revenues.

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<sup>157</sup> Shapoatov (2004), 73.

<sup>158</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 696-97; Roy (2007), xviii.

<sup>159</sup> Gullette (2010), 57.

<sup>160</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1108; Akiner (2001), 20; Collins (2003), 173. On the problematic nature of using the term ‘clan’ with reference to Tajik society, see Kilavuz (2007), 112-120; Kilavuz (2009a); Gullette (2010).



They could not know the parlous state of the Tajik (and USSR) economy overall, and instead presumed that resources were being unfairly distributed to other regions at their expense.<sup>161</sup> This sort of competition and sense of injustice remained a mostly *latent* social grievance in the late Soviet period, but it was activated to great effect during the post-independence turmoil.

For most of the civil war period (1992-1997), Tajikistan was divided into three regions and one autonomous region:

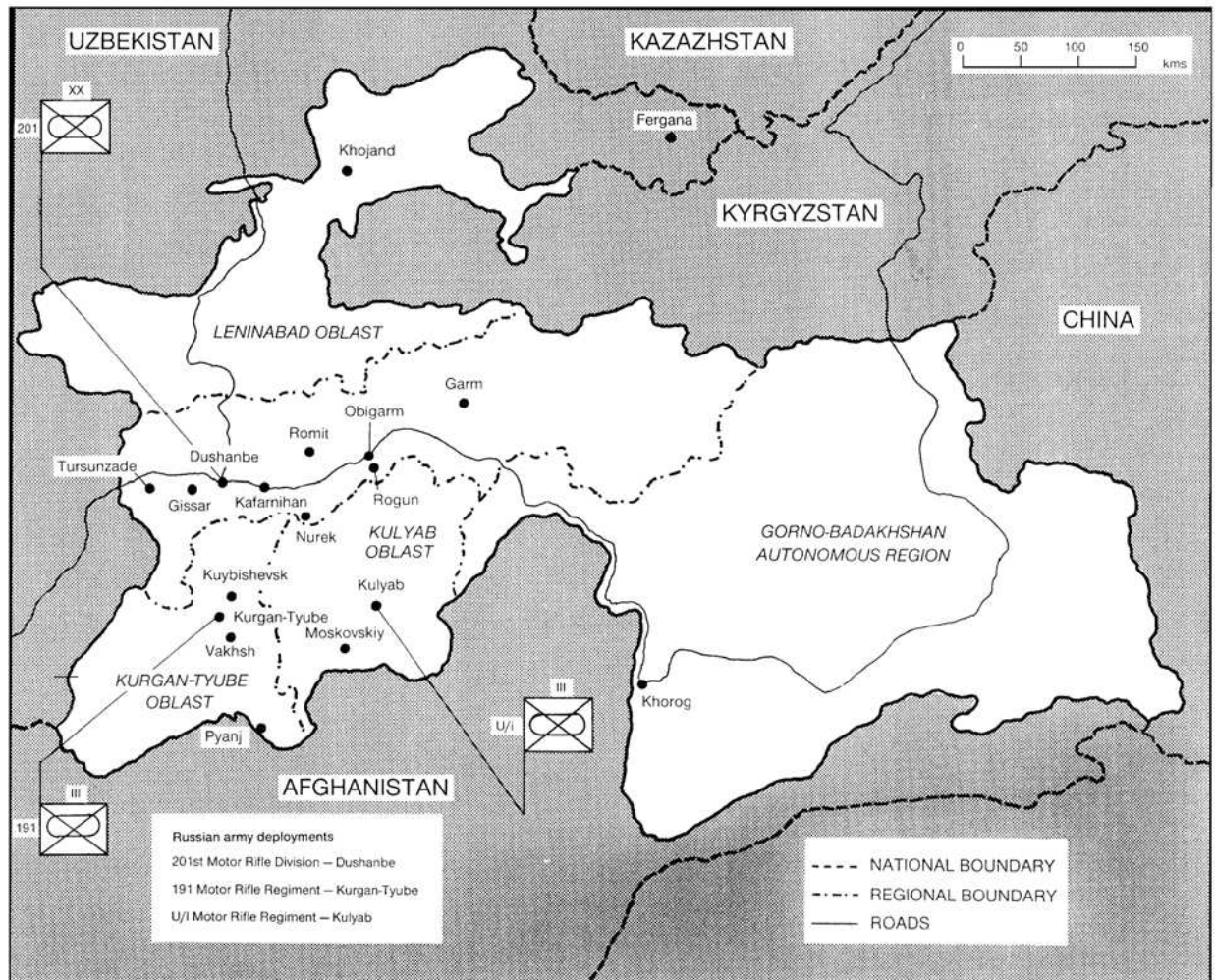
- Dushanbe and its subordinate districts, including Gharm and Hissar
- Leninabad, the northern region known since 2000 as Sughd
- Khatlon, the southern region created in 1993 from the merger of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab
- Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), comprising the eastern half of the country.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Matveeva (2009), 7.

<sup>162</sup> For an explanation of Soviet administrative structures as they pertain to Central Asia, see Roy (2007), 64-66.

Map 2.2. Tajikistan (1994)<sup>163</sup>



It is perhaps more accurate to say that the war was driven not by regions but by regional *elites*. There was little overt hostility or violence amongst the ordinary inhabitants of different regions in the years leading up to the war. This is not to suggest that inter-communal tensions never existed – communities had clashed over land and water resources in previous decades in Kurgan-Tyube and the Ferghana Valley – but there is a broad consensus that such ‘micro-conflicts’, even when between different ethnic or regional communities (such as Gharmis and Uzbeks), did not represent entrenched or ‘primordial’ communal hatreds.<sup>164</sup> Rather, they were a fairly typical result of competition for resources in the context of impoverishment. Whilst these previous conflicts were to some extent resurrected in the context of civil war violence, they were not the direct cause of the war itself.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Accessed 2 October 2010 at: [http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/publications/full/bsb1-4\\_sherr.pdf](http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/publications/full/bsb1-4_sherr.pdf)

<sup>164</sup> Roy (1997), 145; Kilavuz (2007), 187-88; Heathershaw (2011), 24; Rubin (1998), 135; Akiner (2009), 343.

<sup>165</sup> Roy (2001), 23.

During the civil war, conflict was driven by competition for power and resources amongst regional elites, who were able to mobilise militias and spark an escalating war of atrocities within the broader population. As Kilavuz notes,

*The conflict started in Dushanbe as a struggle among elites at the republic level, and then spread to other regions through the activity of militias. This was a top-down mobilization. The activation of networks by the elites and their decision to work with illegal groups for the support of their cause were especially important for the beginning of the civil war, and its spread to other regions of the country.*

He thus rejects the notion that the civil war occurred due to local conflicts becoming somehow intensified (an alternative explanation for civil war outbreak in the theoretical literature).<sup>166</sup>

However, as the war went on, and large-scale civilian victimisation occurred, communal violence reinforced regional affiliations to a much greater degree. Revenge and Tajik 'blood feud' norms spurred demonisation and hatred of opposing regions, and dissenting members within each region fled or were driven out, leaving more homogenised districts behind. The ethnic cleansing operations in Dushanbe in 1993 – in which civilians were singled out solely according to regional origin – demonstrate that regionalism indeed became an important shaper of violence in the later stages of the conflict.<sup>167</sup>

Given the central importance of regionalism to the causes and conduct of the war, the salient characteristics of each region are here briefly described.

### Dushanbe

Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, was little more than a weekly bazaar town until it became the capital of the new Soviet Tajik Republic in 1929. Its population grew sharply in the Soviet era (to roughly 600,000 in 1989). The Dushanbe region includes a number of subordinate districts to the east and west of the city. Gharm (a mountainous region northeast of Dushanbe in the Karategin/Rasht Valley) and Hissar (an industrial region west of Dushanbe, on the Uzbek border) played a significant role in the civil war. Gharmis made up a large portion of both the pre-war intelligentsia and the Islamist opposition forces, and the region was a primary location for guerrilla fighters during the second phase of the war. Gharmi opposition to the regime was

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<sup>166</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 695, 711.

<sup>167</sup> Rubin (1998), 130, 143.

largely a result of the growing economic (but not political) power of Gharmi elites, their resentment of Leninabadi political dominance, and their frustration with a lack of social mobility.<sup>168</sup> Conversely, Hissar – like most other Uzbek areas – largely supported the pro-government forces during the first year of the war; some of the most powerful PFT factions and commanders hailed from Hissar.<sup>169</sup> Following the Kulyabi takeover of the regime in 1993, however, Hissar became a locus of resistance to Dushanbe's attempts at political consolidation.

### Leninabad

The Leninabad (now Sughd) region, encompassing the northern spur of the country, is surrounded by Uzbek and Kyrgyz territory and separated from the rest of Tajikistan by the Zarafshan mountains, which until recently were impassable by road in the winter. Historically the region was part of the Kokand Emirate, whilst most of the rest of the republic was carved out of territory from the Emirate of Bukhara. The Kokand Emirate had been directly incorporated into tsarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and thus was exposed to industrialisation and modern education much earlier than other areas. As a result of these historical and geographical circumstances, Leninabad has had a large Uzbek population (roughly one-third of the region's population), closer ties to Uzbekistan, and an important role as the industrial centre of Tajikistan.<sup>170</sup> By the end of the Soviet era, Leninabad accounted for about 65 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP.<sup>171</sup>

Significantly, Leninabad was also the first region to be taken by the Bolsheviks, and the only region where they could recruit sufficiently educated and modernised personnel to run the republic. It remained the power base for the Tajik Communist Party throughout the Soviet era, supplying the ranks of Party members as well as all First Secretaries after 1946. Northern elites formed solid political and personal networks aimed at consolidating their hold on power, excluding other regions from advancing in the political and economic spheres: for example, through 1992, three-quarters of 'key positions' in government were held by Leninabadis.<sup>172</sup> This dominance should not obscure, however, the participation of elites from other regions in key government posts or the fact that from the 1980s the Leninabadis lost full control of the security sector to the Pamiris. They also never firmly controlled political structures in the rural areas of other provinces.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Auten (1996), 200; Akbarzadeh (1996), 1107.

<sup>169</sup> Rubin (1993), 75; Kuzmin (2001), 178-79.

<sup>170</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 36-37.

<sup>171</sup> Shirazi (1997), 620, quoting FBIS, 3 June 1992.

<sup>172</sup> Atkin (1997b), 292; see also Kuzmin (2001), 176.

<sup>173</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 104; Roy (2007), 114; Heathershaw (2011), 22.

Nevertheless, the region's grip on power in Tajikistan stoked resentment among other regions and proved a major factor in the outbreak of civil war after independence. The lack of significant interaction between inhabitants of Leninabad and the other regions meant there was little basis for resentment and hostility, aside from the inescapable fact that the northerners controlled both the political apparatus and the flow of resources into the country. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, that status quo was determined to be ripe for change by previously marginalised groups.

### Khatlon

Southern Tajikistan is largely agricultural and the most populous region of the country. In 1993, the two southern regions of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab were merged to form the administrative region of Khatlon. However, the two areas retain distinct identities and, as civil war adversaries, throughout most of this dissertation will be referred to as separate entities.<sup>174</sup>

Kurgan-Tyube was the site of most of the armed clashes during the first year of the civil war (along with Dushanbe) and as Human Rights Watch noted at the time, its 'complex demographic structure is key to understanding the pattern and targets of violence that characterised the civil war'.<sup>175</sup> Historically, Kurgan-Tyube was largely an arid desert, sparsely peopled by Lakay Uzbeks and nomads who spoke Tajik but considered themselves 'Arabs by descent'.<sup>176</sup> Beginning in the late 1920s, however, the imposition of massive irrigation projects and cotton farming operations by the Soviets transformed the region into a more settled, agricultural area. This also required an expanded labour force, and over the next few decades, hundreds of thousands of people were transferred from mountainous regions like Gharm and the Pamirs, as well as parts of Kulyab.<sup>177</sup> Entire villages were relocated whole and generally resettled within a single kolkhoz, or as distinct 'brigades' or kishlaks within a larger kolkhoz, thus retaining longstanding social and geographical identities.<sup>178</sup>

This internal migration of highlanders to the lowlands introduced more volatile demographics to Kurgan-Tyube, as the self-contained kolkhoz system allowed the newcomers – who continued to be collectively referred to as 'Gharmis' and 'Kulyabis' – to remain in many cases non-integrated and culturally distinct whilst at the same time competing for resources in their

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<sup>174</sup> Akiner (2001), 8, 23.

<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), 30.

<sup>176</sup> Rubin (1993), 74; Roy (1997), 139.

<sup>177</sup> Akiner (2001), 23; Roy (2007), 95; Rubin (1998), 134; Rakowska-Harmstone (1970), 55. The Soviets conducted similar population transfers to support cotton farming in Leninabad, as described in Ferrando (2011).

<sup>178</sup> Roy (2001), 23.

new homeland.<sup>179</sup> This set the stage for future communitarian conflict. As Roy notes, 'The end result of sedentarisation and forced population transfers was often to create competition between groups which had not hitherto been in competition. The systematic territorialisation implemented by the Soviets also had the consequence of creating antagonisms between ethnic groups where they had not existed before'.<sup>180</sup>

Throughout most of the Soviet era, the inhabitants of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab had little power or wealth. Starting in the 1970s, however, the elites of Leninabad initiated a cooperative relationship with the Kulyabis that endured until the civil war. The reasons for the emergence of this cooperation are several, including the rise of a more educated elite in Kulyab and economic ties resulting from cotton production; northern elites may also have initiated the alliance with Kulyab in order to hold off demands from frustrated Gharimi elites.<sup>181</sup> Leninabad remained the dominant party, acting as a patron to the less powerful Kulyabis. Today, however, the Kulyabi elite are the most powerful faction in the country, due in large part to the fact that their armed militias were the first and strongest defenders of the regime as civil war broke out.

#### Gorno-Badakhshan

Gorno-Badakhshan is the largest region of Tajikistan, covering 40 per cent of its territory and most of its eastern half, but it contains only 3 percent of the population due to its most distinguishing physical characteristic: the Pamir Mountains, often referred to as 'the roof of the world', from which the Himalaya, Karakoram, Tien Shan and Hindu Kush mountain ranges unfurl.

The residents of Gorno-Badakhshan are known as Pamiris, an ethnic group characterised by its use of an eastern, rather than western, Persian dialect that cannot be understood elsewhere in the country, as well as the adherence of many to Isma'ilism (a sect of Shi'a Islam) instead of the Sunni Islam dominant in the rest of Tajikistan. Pamiri adherence to Isma'ilism has led to their traditional preference for a secular (as opposed to shari'a) state; Pamiris would potentially face great hardship under a strict Islamic state, given widespread notions of Isma'ilism as heretical (by both Sunnis and Twelver Shi'a).<sup>182</sup> These distinctive linguistic and religious characteristics, unfortunately, made it easier for PFT militias to identify and victimise Pamiris in Dushanbe during the civil war.

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<sup>179</sup> Shirazi (1997), 614; Slim and Hodizoda (2002), 2; Akbarzadeh (1996), 1107; Kuzmin (2001), 178.

<sup>180</sup> Roy (2007), 96.

<sup>181</sup> Shirazi (1997), 614; Rubin (1998), 151.

<sup>182</sup> Shirazi (1997), 613.

During the 1980s, the Pamiris became heavily represented among the security services within the Tajik republic, for two reasons: 1) Soviet Premier Andropov's anti-corruption crusade in the Central Asian republics led him to set the previously marginalised Pamiris into watchdog positions over the Leninabadi and Kulyabi elites at the Ministry of Interior (MVD); 2) following Afghan Isma'ili support for the communist government in Kabul, the Soviets believed the Pamiris were more trustworthy in the security apparatus than the Tajiks and Uzbeks, who might side with their ethno-religious cousins amongst the Afghan mujahidin.<sup>183</sup> This regionalisation of a key security sector would have important consequences during the outbreak of civil war, as Pamiris largely supported the opposition and thus the regime could not depend on MVD police forces to uphold its authority as armed clashes broke out.

In sum, the distinct development of each region's socioeconomic conditions and populations, and the structural mechanisms within which they related to each other, was a critical driver of the outbreak of conflict and perhaps the most important determinant of how violence was organised and targeted.

## 2.5 Islam and Islamism in Tajikistan

Another key organising principle during the civil war was Islam -- or, more specifically, the dispute as to the degree of influence Islam should have in the political and social lives of Tajikistan's citizens. Nevertheless, neither Islam nor Islamism should be seen as a 'cause' of the civil war. Rather, political Islam -- 'a modern political ideology that calls for Islam to be linked in some way to the state' -- helped define and shape the opposition movement, whilst also giving the staunchly secular PFT a substantial vector for demonisation rhetoric and behaviour.<sup>184</sup>

Tajik Muslims -- outside of the Pamirs -- are overwhelmingly Sunni and followers of the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of law), known for its use of rationalist and subjective judgment in interpreting Islamic principles and laws and considered more liberal than, for example, the Hanbali school popular in Saudi Arabia.<sup>185</sup> The Hanafi emphasis on consensus-building 'facilitated the Islamization of pre-Islamic norms and traditions' and was key for the spread of Sufism, a mystical and highly spiritual form of Islam that from the eleventh century was the primary vehicle for the Islamisation of Central Asia beyond urban centres.<sup>186</sup> Sufism is

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<sup>183</sup> Rubin (1993), 75; Roy (2007), 106, 128.

<sup>184</sup> Collins (2007), 67; Interviews (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>185</sup> Olimova (1999), 1; Lewis (2008), 185.

<sup>186</sup> Naumkin (2005), 7.

controversial in other parts of the Islamic world – particularly in Arab regions, where Sufis are often considered heretics. In Central and South Asia, however, Sufism thoroughly permeates both the practice of Islam and the structure of rural society.<sup>187</sup> The prevalence of Sufi Islamic beliefs and practices helps account for Tajik resistance to certain fundamentalist or Wahhabist strains of Islam, according to which Sufis are apostates and legitimate targets of violence.

Soviet attitudes toward Islam in Central Asia vacillated between harsh repression and accommodation. In the 1930s, the darkest years of Stalinism, the Soviets destroyed mosques and executed Islamic scholars; in the 1940s, when Stalin needed Muslim support in the Second World War, the campaign of enforced atheism was relaxed. In 1943 Stalin created four 'spiritual directorates' to govern the affairs of Soviet Muslims; each Soviet republic also had its own *Qazi*, a sort of head Islamic judge and theologian. After the war, these official religious institutions were used to channel Soviet Islam into acceptable paths; they restricted the practice of Islam to minor levels whilst also advertising official tolerance of Islam for Cold War propaganda purposes.<sup>188</sup>

This form of 'official Islam' was not popular in Tajikistan and the other Central Asian republics. Instead, a more traditional or 'parallel' Islam endured and covertly sustained popular religious practices throughout the Soviet era.<sup>189</sup> The pivotal figures in this process were the Sufi shaykhs, who were extremely respected within Tajik society due to their longstanding and hereditary roles as custodians of traditional shrines, educators, spiritual guides and advocates for the unfortunate. Despite the risks of imprisonment or exile, many shaykhs continued to lead religious activities in secret and thus helped maintain the practice of a more authentic and traditional form of Islam than that allowed by official Islam. Many Tajiks maintained a sort of dual identity: publicly communist, privately religious. This unspoken bargain worked for the most part, but it was not sustainable. The loosening authority of the Soviet regime in the 1980s allowed a burgeoning of religious expression in Tajikistan, as discussed in the following section.

In short, an examination of Islam and Islamism in Tajikistan yields several significant insights into the normative stance and affiliation of conflict actors. It helps explain the rhetoric and political ideology of the major combatant forces; the resistance of most Tajiks to more radical ideologies; and the mechanisms by which Islamic beliefs and practices survived the brutal Soviet era and were thus able to exert such substantial influence upon conflict actors. These normative influences would play a key role in shaping civilian victimisation, as they facilitated

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<sup>187</sup> Roy (2007), 4, 144.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 150-51.

<sup>189</sup> Akiner (2001), 29; Olcott (1994), 151; Roy (2007), 151-53; Bennigsen (1985), 90-91; Atkin (1989), 605.



processes of demonisation and self-defence legitimisation that helped actors transcend societal taboos against violence toward civilians.

## **2.6 Tajikistan in the Turbulent 1980s: Military, Political and Economic**

### **Developments**

During the last fifteen years of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, a number of pivotal events and trends occurred that would contribute to the outbreak of civil war and the manner in which it was conducted. Among these were: the Soviet war in Afghanistan; political and economic instability; and the flowering of Islamic cultural, religious and political organisations.

The Tajik republic was an important staging ground for Soviet operations in Afghanistan. Central Asian Muslims comprised 30-40 per cent of the initial invading force, and the Soviets utilised Tajiks in particular as interpreters.<sup>190</sup> This helped introduce new Islamist interpretations into the Tajik republic.<sup>191</sup> As the war evolved in part into an ideological confrontation between communism and Islam, many Tajiks felt increasingly drawn to the latter. Islam, as an identity and mobilising force, appeared much more dynamic, powerful and egalitarian to Tajiks suffering in the poorest Soviet republic, dominated by ethnic Russians from faraway Moscow. The brutal manner in which the Soviets conducted the war – more than a million Afghans were killed – also led Central Asian Muslims to sympathise more deeply with the mujahidin cause.<sup>192</sup>

Thus, the Afghan war played a key role in the emerging Tajik Islamist movement, whilst also serving as a bleak tutorial to all Tajik factions of the realities of intrastate war. During the Tajik civil war, the enduring Afghan conflict was often invoked as a worst-case scenario to be avoided at all costs.<sup>193</sup> Importantly, the Afghan war also laid the groundwork for cross-border affiliations in the context of conflict. Afghan Tajiks were known to retreat into Tajik territory during combat with the Soviets; during the Tajik civil war, opposition militants retreated to bases in northern Afghanistan. Later, Afghan Tajiks would again make use of Tajik territory when pressed by the Taliban.

Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost policies – combined with economic afflictions – contributed to regional tensions and potential threats to the status quo. The inability of the

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<sup>190</sup> Shapoatov (2004), 75; Kayani (2006), 104; Tousley (1995), 49.

<sup>191</sup> Lewis (2008), 166.

<sup>192</sup> Roy (2007), 154.

<sup>193</sup> Interview (OSCE-Tajikistan), London, 2009.

Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) to cope with poverty and unemployment in the republic – which reached critical levels in the 1980s – fed popular resentment of the government (and, hence, the Leninabadis) and decreased the legitimacy of communism even further. (Whilst the communist regime did not admit to any unemployment, IMF figures later estimated Tajik unemployment in 1990 to be 22.8 per cent.<sup>194</sup>) Marginalised groups – i.e., factions outside the ruling Leninabad-Kulyab patronage networks – searched for alternative ideological rallying points, and turned to nationalism, democracy and political Islam. Popular frustrations over unemployment, corruption and environmental degradation – previously taboo topics – began to be aired. All of these grievances would gradually become politicised by Tajik intelligentsia and facilitate the formation of new political activist groups.<sup>195</sup>

Leninabad power was further diminished by Moscow's withdrawal of subsidies to the republic upon the breakup of the Soviet Union; this not only wrecked the economy, a Leninabadi responsibility, but also drastically reduced the amount of patronage the Leninabadis could dole out. Rubin notes that states dependent on external funding are 'particularly susceptible to conflict among ethnic and other groups if subsidies decline'; in Tajikistan, where subsidies from Moscow made up 40-50 per cent (or, according to unofficial estimates, up to 80 per cent) of government expenditures, the CPT was forced to 'search for new sources of political support, which it found in regionalism and patron-client relations'.<sup>196</sup> In short, the power relationships amongst the regional elites within Tajikistan were not driven wholly by endogenous factors, but heavily influenced by decisions and developments in Moscow.

A number of key civil war actors emerged in the late 1980s as a result of glasnost liberalisation. Rastakhiz, founded in 1989, focused on Tajik cultural renewal and was popular amongst the intelligentsia and students.<sup>197</sup> A more important player was the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), founded in 1990, which explicitly advocated Tajik independence and the creation of a parliamentary democracy and market economy. La'li Badakhshan, also created in 1990, originated as a mainly cultural group for Pamiri elites, but later took on a more political cast, advocating greater autonomy for Gorno-Badakhshan. These new movements were largely secular and democratically oriented, with varying tinges of nationalistic appeals.

Finally, the relaxation of official controls on Islam and the influx of new activist ideals into the republic would have a major impact on the post-independence landscape. The combination of

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<sup>194</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1108.

<sup>195</sup> Akiner (2001), 25-34; Lubin, et al. (1999), 41.

<sup>196</sup> Rubin (1993), 73. See also Rubin (1998), 140; EBRD Quarterly Economic Review for Tajikistan (April 1993), 1; Wiegmann (2009), 33; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26/11/93.

<sup>197</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 8; Shirazi (1997), 615.

political repression, economic deprivation and a 'stagnating' official clergy encouraged many young Tajiks to investigate the ideas of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood; the Salafi principles espoused by ideologues such as al-Banna and Qutb were gradually recast by Tajik Islamists, who recognised the strong local preference for traditional Islamic practices and a secular state.<sup>198</sup> Under glasnost in the 1980s, Soviet authorities allowed a renewal of religious expression in the republic: mosques and madrassahs were reopened and contacts with foreign Muslim organisations permitted. Reportedly, the number of mosques in Tajikistan rose from 17 in the pre-glasnost era to more than 4000.<sup>199</sup>

With this new spirit in the air, in October 1990 an underground conference formally created the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP), or *Hizb-i Nehzat-i Islami*. Its aims included spiritual revival, political sovereignty for the republic and legal rights for its citizens, and the spread of 'Islamic norms' throughout society and politics.<sup>200</sup> IRP leader Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda stated at the time that the IRP wanted a democratic state, not an Islamic one; whilst tagged as 'fundamentalist' or 'Wahhabist' by opponents, the IRP never officially called for the establishment of an Islamic state or imposition of *shari'a*, mainly because it did not believe this to be a feasible goal.<sup>201</sup> Yet the IRP, along with other opposition groups, struggled to gain recruits; political Islam as an ideology had not spread far beyond urban areas. A notable exception were the Gharmis, a traditionally deeply religious group, who in their political opposition to the regime drifted more heavily toward the IRP.<sup>202</sup>

The deeply conservative communist regime itself was so enamoured of the status quo that unlike other Central Asian regimes, it remained hostile to the republic-based nationalism sweeping through the entire Soviet Union. Whilst other republic leaderships incorporated nationalistic sentiments in their attempts to stay in power, the Tajik elite

*fell back on its Soviet phraseology and reiterated its commitment to 'internationalism' in the framework of the Soviet Union. This was done even after the collapse of the Union. The leadership's lack of political perception and its staunch defence of the status quo contributed to the deterioration of the crisis.*<sup>203</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Lewis (2008), 185; Williams (2003), 72; Collins (2007), 87; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>199</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1120. In the Tajik context, however, a small prayer room in a rural village could be considered a mosque.

<sup>200</sup> Naumkin (2005), 209. See also Olimova (1999), 4.

<sup>201</sup> Rubin (1993), 76; Kilavuz (2009b), 694; Shirazi (1997), 616; Heathershaw (2011), 25; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>202</sup> Rubin (1998), 143; Collins (2007), 75; Shapoatov (2004), 14.

<sup>203</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1105.

In sum, the political and economic dislocations of the 1980s shaped the strategic environment by spawning a number of new actors and ideological currents that would play a pivotal role in the civil war. Without this prolonged period of gradual liberalisation and disintegration, it is unlikely the contest for power in the post-independence era would have featured so many players, or that some of them would have been so influential. However, it is worth remembering that similar political and social processes were ongoing in the other Central Asian republics, which managed to transition to independent statehood without major conflict. The drawn-out death throes of the Soviet Union shaped the outbreak of war in Tajikistan in many ways, but they did not make conflict inevitable.

## **2.7 The Kulyabi Mafia Before the War**

Finally, a closer look at the development of organised crime networks in the Kulyab region helps explain the nature and origins of the PFT, whose behaviour is the focus of this dissertation. Criminal groups ran rampant in the Soviet ‘shadow economies’ that emerged in the stagnant 1970s and gradually opening 1980s.<sup>204</sup> In Central Asia, traditional forms of authority and political interaction were overlaid with the illicit connections and networks typical of organised crime and government corruption. As defined by Rubin, “‘Clan’ connotes the use of the idiom of kinship to cement solidarity within the parallel economy and patronage networks of Central Asia... ‘Mafia’ connotes the use of violent sanctions within those same networks’.”<sup>205</sup>

Local and regional mafias ran the shadow economies, exploiting state resources for criminal gain and establishing parallel, independent socioeconomic structures and personal ‘fiefdoms’.<sup>206</sup> Economists estimated that the black market (which was especially strong in agricultural products) accounted for more than a quarter of the Tajik GDP.<sup>207</sup> The shadow economies produced local authority figures who had significant wealth and local legitimacy but no place in the official structures of the Soviet system. Instead, these criminal networks formed symbiotic relationships with various political actors, providing funds, goods and a source for coercive threats in exchange for official protection from arrest or interference (a common dynamic throughout the Soviet Union, it could be seen as ‘Brezhnev’s solution for a

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<sup>204</sup> Williams (2003), 88. The term ‘shadow economy’ refers not only to illicit activity but ‘informal activity’ such as bartering, undeclared employment and other hidden economic activity. Jackson notes that ‘there is a very fuzzy distinction between criminal and non-criminal activities in the former Soviet Union’. Jackson (2005), 48.

<sup>205</sup> Rubin (1998), 148.

<sup>206</sup> Akiner (2001), 26-27; Lubin, et al. (1999), 43, 68-69; UNODC (2007), 9.

<sup>207</sup> Olimova (1999), 3.

stifling centralized economy').<sup>208</sup> These connections would later be used to mobilise men and arms when war broke out.

Criminality also expanded with the emergence of an unemployed, anti-social pool of Tajik youth. Birth rates in the republic were high, and in 1980, 60 per cent of the population were youths under sixteen:

*Some of these jobless youths began to drift to the cities in search of work but for the most part they were unable to integrate into urban life. They remained on the margins of society and were easily drawn into anti-social behaviour. Soldiers returning from service in Afghanistan became a ready source of narcotics; small arms, too, began to circulate illegally. Sports groups specialising in martial arts acquired great popularity at this time; many of them had a criminal character. Thus, a youth sub-culture developed that was beyond the control of the authorities. It was characterised by a volatile compound of alienation, frustration and pent-up aggression.*<sup>209</sup>

In time, this pool of marginalised and aggressive men would be tapped for political as well as criminal violence.

In Kulyab, a substantial criminal organisation had emerged by the time of independence, in part due to the added opportunities and connections resulting from the 'alliance' with the Leninabadis.<sup>210</sup> Among the leading criminal bosses was Sangak Safarov.

*Born in 1928, Safarov, because of his connections, age and life experience, was the leader of a number of neighbourhood communities in the city of Kulyab... Safarov headed a cluster of traditional male unions, or gashtaks, which provided him with human resources for political and military action. Across Kulyab, Safarov was respectfully known as bobo Sangak, i.e. the 'grandfather'. Contrary to some speculations, Safarov was not a 'thief-in-law'—the highest informal rank in the Soviet underworld. Nonetheless, his*

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<sup>208</sup> *The New Republic* (Sterling), 11/4/94; Kuzmin (2001), 188.

<sup>209</sup> Akiner (2001), 26.

<sup>210</sup> Rubin (1998), 151.

*authority amongst criminal figures not only in Tajikistan and Central Asia, but also elsewhere in the Soviet Union was exceptionally high.*<sup>211</sup>

Safarov spent more than twenty years in prison for murder and other offences. He then spent most of the 1980s running a bar (always helpful for illicit activity and networking) in the city of Kulyab. He was well known in Dushanbe as a leader of the 'Kulyabi mafia', which accumulated money and influence by enforcing protection rackets, collecting debts, engaging in extortion and the like.<sup>212</sup> Safarov had good connections with corrupt local and national elites as well as a broad base of local supporters through his leadership of several *gashtaks*. His political leanings were foreshadowed by his chairmanship of *Oshkoro*, a Kulyabi political organisation created in 1989 to promote Kulyabi interests within the context of an opening political arena (its slogan was 'Kulyab for the Kulyabis').<sup>213</sup> He was thus well placed to organise an armed force from amongst both his criminal and traditional networks of associates when the regime's call for help came in 1992.

Other than the illicit nature of their economic activity, the Kulyabi mafia did not significantly differ from other solidarity groups at the time. It was an informal network of men with common interests and associations, with a social structure apparent to its members. As Roy notes,

*...the much-decried mafia can be seen as just a solidarity group oriented towards 'business'. The war in Tajikistan has shown the inter-relatedness of these different kinds of networks: Sangak Safarov, head of the Kulyabi militias, and Yakub Salimov, minister of the interior from 1993 to 1994, were 'mafia' figures allegedly involved in smuggling and racketeering during the Soviet era, but they immediately became military leaders of the Kulyabi faction, because their mafia was simply the expression of Kulyabi solidarity networks, with access to arms and money.*<sup>214</sup>

The criminal groups that formed an important basis for the PFT did not emerge from a vacuum; they had a long and established history within Kulyab before independence and civil war. The criminals who fought in the war should not be seen solely as disenfranchised, unproductive and sociopathic members of society (although undoubtedly some were); many were members of informal but organised social networks that generated significant sums of

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<sup>211</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 115.

<sup>212</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 701.

<sup>213</sup> Kuzmin (2001), 178; Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh (2002), 2; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>214</sup> Roy (2007), 100.

money and local status in the pre-war era.<sup>215</sup> With the disappearance of the Soviet mechanisms that the Leninabadis used to maintain 'social control', the Kulyabi mafia groups became even more potentially powerful. Thus, an examination of the pre-war Kulyabi mafia helps dispel the notion that the PFT engaged in victimisation simply because its members were criminals and 'dead-enders' accustomed to individualistic and irrational violence.

## **2.8 Conclusion: Zones of Conflict and Centres of Gravity**

A key assumption within the strategic approach is that strategic discourse and military engagements cannot on their own account for an actor's strategy and behaviour. It is necessary to examine their strategic environment and the broader historical and structural context to their use of violence. This chapter has examined seven aspects of pre-war Tajik society and politics that were the most influential upon the outbreak of conflict, the mobilisation of conflict actors and the organisation of violent behaviour during the war.

All of the factors noted above resulted in violence being limited, for the most part, to four zones of conflict within the country. Civilian victimisation was prominent in each of these four zones. They were:

- Dushanbe and nearby raions (e.g., Hissar and Kofarnihon). Here the violence consisted largely of urban warfare between militias.
- Khatlon, in particular the Vakhsh river valley and the flatlands of Kurgan-Tyube. There was a wider range of violence here: urban warfare in Kurgan-Tyube city, armed clashes between militias on the kolkhozy, and ethnic cleansing of villages and farms.
- The Tajik-Afghan border, on the southern edge of Kurgan-Tyube. The conflict here was complicated by the presence of Russian Border Troops and Afghan mujahidin. There were armed clashes between militias, attacks on the thousands of refugees penned up against the Amu Darya, and gunfights between the Border Troops and infiltrators from Afghanistan.
- The Karategin and Tavildara valleys, east of Dushanbe. These were opposition strongholds, and the site of several government offensives to eliminate their militias.

The civil war proved to be fairly chaotic, with largely autonomous field commanders operating in an ad hoc and opportunistic manner. As the war progressed, however, several targets

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<sup>215</sup> Here this dissertation departs from Driscoll (2009), which cites the criminals who made up the pro-regime militias as people with 'little to lose'.

emerged as key centres of gravity for the opposing forces in each region:

- Dushanbe and the larger regional towns (Kurgan-Tyube city, Kofarnihon, Pyanj, Gharm). The towns emerged as key targets for various reasons: for example, Kofarnihon and Gharm because they were opposition strongholds, and Pyanj because it was a key border crossing.
- The kolkhozy in Kurgan-Tyube, where much of the population was settled and large amounts of food, fuel and other resources could be plundered.
- Major infrastructure targets such as the Nurek dam, which were attractive for the leverage they would provide to whoever controlled them.
- The major river valleys, such as Vakhsh and Karategin. Control of the valleys meant control of most of the population and arable land, and often the only transport routes through the countryside and to the borders.

In sum, the conflict was shaped not just by the political aspects of the conflict nor by the resources commanded by each side, but by the physical environment in which they operated and the normative characteristics that determined the targets of armed force. Bearing this in mind, the dissertation now turns to the events of the civil war itself and the emergence of the PFT as a conflict actor.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A STRATEGIC HISTORY OF THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR AND THE POPULAR FRONT OF TAJIKISTAN**

The complexity and obscurity of the Tajik civil war has hindered the development of strategic case studies of the conflict and its combatants, thus necessitating the construction of an expanded strategic history before evaluating dynamics of civilian victimisation. This chapter presents this strategic history both as an empirical contribution to the literature and as a necessary step in the five-step strategic approach outlined in Chapter 1. Before turning to the specifics of PFT targeting choices, and having already considered the strategic environment in which they operated, it is necessary to consider their actual strategic behaviour over the course of the conflict.

This chapter thus focuses on the emergence and development of the PFT, whilst also providing an original overview of the conflict's key events. I address and answer a number of questions critical to understanding the wartime behaviour of the PFT, including:

- What were the origins of the PFT?
- Who were its leaders and members?
- Why and where did it fight?
- What war-fighting strategies did it pursue?
- How was it supplied and organised?
- How did it change over time?

For the purposes of this analysis, I have divided the time period under discussion into two phases. Phase I represents the first year of the war (1992-93), which featured the most intense fighting and concluded with the dissolution of the PFT following its victory in Dushanbe. Phase II covers the following four years of irregular warfare and political-criminal violence (1993-97), during which PFT members both challenged and supported the new regime. The chapter concludes with a summary evaluation of the PFT as a combatant force and conflict actor.

#### **3.1 Phase I: 1992-1993**

This section presents the events of the war from the outbreak of conflict in May 1992 until the transition to cross-border warfare in 1993. It covers the emergence of conflict in Dushanbe, its transmission to southern Tajikistan, and the eventual Kulyabi victory in Kurgan-Tyube and the capital. It includes the full trajectory of the PFT's existence, from its initial formation during the Dushanbe demonstrations to its dissolution in March 1993.

### 3.1.1 The Outbreak of Conflict and the Creation of the 'National Guard'

The years immediately preceding Tajik independence in 1991 saw the gradual coalescence of two political blocs: 1) the status-quo-seeking Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT), propped up by the Leninabad-Kulyab elite alliance; and 2) an array of 'opposition tendencies' and marginalised groups, prominently (although not exclusively) featuring Gharmi and Pamiri elites.<sup>216</sup> Brutally suppressed demonstrations, such as those in Dushanbe in February 1990, indicated that the regime's mechanisms of 'social control' were slipping.<sup>217</sup> However, the CPT remained intransigent, and fatally decided to support the failed hardliner coup attempt against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on 19 August 1991.<sup>218</sup> This set in motion a series of protests, counter-protests, and parliamentary responses that culminated in the sacking of the republic's hardliner president and the declaration of Tajik independence on 9 September 1991.<sup>219</sup>

Independence was a shocking – and not particularly welcome – development for many Tajiks.<sup>220</sup> As recently as March 1991, a majority of Tajiks had voted against national sovereignty in a public referendum.<sup>221</sup> Even the opposition parties largely favoured reform and greater autonomy, not the instant destruction of the political and economic system within which Tajikistan was embedded. As noted by Rubin, Tajikistan 'became nominally independent without a clear national identity, an integrated territory, a viable economic base for the livelihood of its people or the finances of its government, or genuine national security forces'.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, the fragile new state managed to hold a presidential election in November 1991, which was won by Rahmon Nabiev, a Leninabadi and former First Secretary of the CPT who had already been installed as an interim leader by parliament. Nabiev used his victory (which was disputed by the opposition) to maintain the communist hold on power and crack down on Islamist and democratic opposition groups.<sup>223</sup>

The spark for a long chain of events that would culminate in civil war came in March 1992, when Supreme Soviet Chairman Safarali Kenjaev arranged the dismissal of Interior Minister Mamadayaz Navjuvanov, a Pamiri.<sup>224</sup> This key political loss spurred opposition groups to rally in

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<sup>216</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1110.

<sup>217</sup> Akiner (2001), 28. On the riots, see also: Ro'i (1991); Nourzhanov (2005), 115; Atkin (1997b), 284; Kilavuz (2007), 131-32.

<sup>218</sup> Rashid (2003), 173; Rubin (1993), 77.

<sup>219</sup> On the events surrounding Tajik independence, see in particular: Akbarzadeh (1996); Akiner (2001); Atkin (1997b); Rubin (1993); Rashid (2003).

<sup>220</sup> Zviagelskaya (1997), 4; Matveeva (2009), 16.

<sup>221</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 73.

<sup>222</sup> Rubin testimony (1994). See also: Rubin (1998), 128.

<sup>223</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 151; *The Economist*, 9/5/92.

<sup>224</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 150; Payne (1996), 102; Lynch (2001), 54.

Shahidan Square in central Dushanbe; they exploited their members' regional ties to bring in followers from the countryside.<sup>225</sup> Their primary demands were new elections, the establishment of a true multiparty system, and an end to political persecution.<sup>226</sup> However, many rural residents drawn to the demonstrations were motivated by economic rather than political issues (e.g., the terrible state of the rural economy and their months of unpaid labour since independence). This opposition rally was then matched by a pro-regime demonstration that was organised in nearby Azadi Square.<sup>227</sup> Dushanbe 'became paralysed by the two demonstrations', as tens of thousands of people flowed in from rural areas, most of them encouraged by their local kolkhoz directors, mullahs or other local leaders.<sup>228</sup>

Whilst the IRP used its rural mullahs to mobilise thousands of young men, Nabiev and Kenjaev turned primarily to criminal actors to mobilise rural support. Sangak Safarov, the notorious Kulyabi criminal, organised the arrival in Azadi Square of thousands of Kulyabis.<sup>229</sup> They were armed with sticks and Soviet flags; their opposition counterparts similarly lacked firearms.<sup>230</sup> Soviet Tajikistan had had low levels of gun ownership outside the police and armed forces, and it was only in the coming days that the proliferation of small arms would take hold and fuel spiralling levels of violence.<sup>231</sup>

Perhaps the best characterisation of this process of mobilisation comes courtesy of Kilavuz, who conceptualises it as 'network activation' by political elites willing to utilise their connections with 'violence specialists' in order to further their own interests.<sup>232</sup> In this case, the connection between the president of the republic and a notorious crime boss was relatively straightforward: Nabiev's prime minister had worked closely with Safarov and Kenjaev to organise support for the Nabiev presidential campaign.<sup>233</sup> In this way, the corrupt crucible of the Nabiev regime produced a powerful political-criminal network that was easily activated when Nabiev and Kenjaev were under threat.

On 2 May 1992, Nabiev established a 'special battalion' to guard the presidential palace and parliament, and authorised the disbursement of 1,800 Kalashnikovs to pro-regime

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<sup>225</sup> Roy (2007), 139; Akiner (2009), 347.

<sup>226</sup> Splidsboel-Hansen (1999), 10; Human Rights Watch (1993), xvi.

<sup>227</sup> Reuters, 7/5/92; *New York Times*, 7/5/92; *Moscow News*, 3/5/92.

<sup>228</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), xvi; Kilavuz (2009b), 701.

<sup>229</sup> Rivalries between Nabiev and other Leninabadi elites impeded a similar kind of mobilisation in that region; in the end, most pro-regime demonstrators came from Kulyab and Hissar. Kilavuz (2009b), 700, 707; Akiner (2001), 20, 37.

<sup>230</sup> BBC/Multiple agencies, 4/5/92; *Christian Science Monitor*, 6/5/92.

<sup>231</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 59; Tadjbakhsh (2008), 9 and (1994), 173.

<sup>232</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 693. See also Akbarzadeh (1996), 1126.

<sup>233</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 178.

demonstrators.<sup>234</sup> The rationale for this act was simple: there was no national army, and MVD police forces, dominated by Pamiris, could not be relied upon to protect the regime.<sup>235</sup> Former Soviet troops still based in Tajikistan – primarily, the 201<sup>st</sup> Motorised Rifle Division in Dushanbe (10,000 soldiers) and the Border Security Forces on the Afghan border (7,500 men, under the Russian KGB) – were ordered by Moscow to stay neutral.<sup>236</sup> Thus, Nabiev’s only reliable option for protection was this ‘special battalion’, also referred to as the ‘National Guard’, assembled from the ranks of the pro-regime demonstrators. The National Guard was commanded by Safarov himself, and many of its members were criminal associates from Kulyab. It formed the kernel of what would eventually become the Popular Front of Tajikistan, and thus its creation was one of the pivotal moments of the conflict. It provided a sheen of legitimacy and an early organisational structure for the Kulyabi militias as well as a defining narrative of self-defence and protection of the republic.

On 5 May, with an estimated 100,000 people participating in the capital’s mass rallies, the first armed clashes occurred.<sup>237</sup> The catalyst appears to have been a confrontation in a village 12 miles from Dushanbe, in which local residents tried to block buses carrying Kulyabis to the capital; several militiamen and fifteen civilians were killed.<sup>238</sup> News of the deadly incident ‘electrified’ the rallies and sparked clashes between the rival camps, with between 14 and 60 people killed that evening.<sup>239</sup> Violence in the city spiralled as militias fought for control of key ministry buildings.<sup>240</sup> However, the chaos and casualties, and the shared desire at that time to avoid all-out civil war, prompted talks between the opposition and the regime, and a truce was quickly called. On 7 May, Tajik Radio announced that an agreement had been reached to form a coalition government, or Government of National Reconciliation (GNR).<sup>241</sup> One-third of the ministries (including the most powerful ministries) were given to the opposition. Nabiev, with curtailed powers, remained president (largely in the interests of stability) but Kenjaev and other CPT hardliners were forced out.<sup>242</sup>

The GNR agreement was widely seen as a victory for the opposition, and reflected facts on the ground: opposition forces had taken control of much of the city.<sup>243</sup> However, some opposition members objected to Nabiev staying in power, and the agreement was also quickly rejected by

<sup>234</sup> Rubin (1993), 78; Kilavuz (2009b), 701; *Christian Science Monitor*, 6/5/92.

<sup>235</sup> Akiner (2001), 37; BBC/Multiple sources, 8/5/92.

<sup>236</sup> Torjesen (2005), 63.

<sup>237</sup> *The Times*, 6/5/92.

<sup>238</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), xvi; *The Times*, 6/5/92; BBC/Postfactum, 7/5/92.

<sup>239</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 701; *New York Times*, 7/5/92; *The Independent*, 7/5/92; *The Times*, 6/5/92.

<sup>240</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 8/5/92(c).

<sup>241</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 8/5/92(a).

<sup>242</sup> *New York Times*, 11/5/92; BBC/Channel 1 TV, 12/5/92; BBC/Multiple sources, 13/5/92.

<sup>243</sup> *Washington Post*, 8/5/92.

the Leninabadi and Kulyabi regional governments.<sup>244</sup> The GNR was essentially doomed to fail: the political struggle between CPT leaders and the opposition continued, now within a singular government, leading to paralysis and continued hostility.

With the GNR agreement, thousands of armed demonstrators from both camps began to return to the countryside – including the National Guard.<sup>245</sup> Already on 13 May, two days after the GNR was signed, people were killed during demonstrations in Kulyab and ‘repression was under way against opposition supporters’ by returning members of the National Guard.<sup>246</sup> The new defence minister stated that ‘in all the countryside the people are taking sticks in their hands, and defending their villages’.<sup>247</sup> In short, political violence from the capital was effectively transmitted to rural areas in the southern regions.<sup>248</sup>

### **3.1.2 The ‘War of the Kolkhozy’ and the Emergence of the PFT**

It was perhaps predictable that the southern regions would bear the brunt of fighting during the war, as their political/demographic mix of Gharmis, Kulyabis and Uzbeks made them the most contested area of the country. In addition, whilst the conflict originated amongst regional elites, the supporters of each faction were not neatly divided by regional origin when war broke out: there were Gharmis who supported the communist regime and Kulyabis who favoured the opposition. Thus, Sangak Safarov and his returning National Guard members began by attacking opposition supporters within Kulyab, along with any associates who disputed his claim to leadership.<sup>249</sup> By the end of June, support for the opposition had been largely eliminated in Kulyab, thus helping the region to become more homogenous in terms of its political and strategic identity.<sup>250</sup> This had the practical result of shifting most of the fighting to Kurgan-Tyube, where a greater mix of regional and political loyalties persisted. There, armed groups and self-defence detachments quickly and often violently established ‘influence spheres’ encompassing villages and kolkhozy in the countryside.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> See BBC/Multiple sources, 22/5/92.

<sup>245</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 701; Human Rights Watch (1993), xvii; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/5/92(b); BBC/Tajik Radio, 12/6/92. For the text of the disarmament decrees, see BBC/Tajik Radio, 9/5/92.

<sup>246</sup> BBC/Channel 1 TV, 14/5/92; BBC/Interfax, 15/5/92(a).

<sup>247</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 14/5/92.

<sup>248</sup> See Kilavuz (2009b) and (2007) for more on this process. No armed conflict occurred on Leninabad territory; it was already geographically removed from the rest of the country, and in May 1992 it blocked the Anzob pass in the Zarafshan Mountains, which had provided the only land route from the south to the north. Nourzhanov (2005), 112.

<sup>249</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 707; Akiner (2009), 369; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b); BBC/Channel 1 TV, 14/5/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/6/92(a); BBC/Interfax, 10/6/92; *Moscow News*, 21/6/92.

<sup>250</sup> Kulyab was emptied of opposition supporters not just because of Safarov’s direct attacks, but because thousands fled to Dushanbe from fear of attack. Human Rights Watch (1993), xvi; BBC/Itar-Tass, 16/6/92(a).

<sup>251</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/6/92; *Moscow News*, 21/6/92.

Safarov became the leader of the Kulyabi forces that emerged from the National Guard and came to be known as the Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT). At the same time, Kenjaev was organising mostly Uzbek militias around Hissar into what he called the Popular Front of Tajikistan-Hissar. (The two groups would later formally merge.) Safarov invoked the language of self-defence, even as his men slaughtered civilians, by saying that his units were ‘defending the constitution and laws violated in May’ and ‘fighting against the threatened creation of an Islamic state’.<sup>252</sup> Officially, the immediate aims of the PFT were the end of the GNR coalition and the return of a secular, authoritarian government; however, the true aims of Safarov and his fellow field commanders were widely perceived to be ‘power and money’.<sup>253</sup> His forces were supplied with automatic weapons and, later, armoured vehicles, some of which were either stolen or bought from Russian army units (particularly in Kurgan-Tyube).<sup>254</sup> Arms were also obtained in Uzbekistan, in exchange for cotton and aluminium, via the criminal connections of PFT commanders in western Tajikistan.<sup>255</sup>

Throughout this phase of the conflict, the network of separate militias that would evolve into the PFT was only loosely coordinated and heavily dependent on illicit activity. The militias were assembled locally, often as ‘self-defence units’, and usually around a core of men returned from the Dushanbe demonstrations or a local crime boss or strongman. Initially they formed ‘local rag-tag bands’, engaging in brief clashes and threatening civilians, but they grew in size and scope of activity throughout the summer, partly thanks to weapons and coordination provided by Safarov and Kenjaev.<sup>256</sup> Men joined the militias for various reasons: to obtain vengeance, to maintain loyalty to a solidarity group, to engage in plunder and rape, to obtain a higher status or position in their region.<sup>257</sup> Many were criminals and engaged in criminal behaviour. Others were coerced into joining, under threat of death.<sup>258</sup> As the summer wore on and the local economy ground to a halt, the need for food and other necessities became a leading motivation to join ‘raiding parties’.<sup>259</sup> Presumably some militia members were influenced by the grand political and ideological narratives of the conflict, but fieldwork amongst former combatants suggests that personal and emotional motivations dominated their decision to join militias.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> UPI, 28/6/92.

<sup>253</sup> Shirazi (1997), 618; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b); Interview (OSCE-Tajikistan), London, 2009.

<sup>254</sup> Tousley (1995), 39; Torjesen, et al. (2005), 66; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 52; Human Rights Watch (1993), xx; Auten (1996), 202.

<sup>255</sup> Akiner (2001), 43.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 43; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 53; Human Rights Watch (1993), xviii; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>257</sup> On individual combatant motivations in civil war, see Kalyvas (2006), 46; it appears Tajiks followed general trends in this regard.

<sup>258</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 704-705, 712.

<sup>259</sup> Heathershaw (2011), 23.

<sup>260</sup> In particular, fieldwork by Kilavuz, who found a range of individual motivations, and Driscoll, who emphasises the pecuniary and status motives of urban militia members.

A brief examination of some of the leading 'field commanders' in both Kulyab and Hissar illustrates the political-criminal nexus that underpinned the PFT. One of Safarov's key deputies in Kurgan-Tyube was Faisali Saidov, a former Soviet army veteran who became known for his 'pathological, unbound hatred of Gharmis and Pamiris' following the murder of his father.<sup>261</sup> Mahmud Khudoberdyev, a tank commander in the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> division who deserted his post in Kulyab, also became a leading PFT field commander after the deaths of family members. Yaqub Salimov, a Kulyabi from the Vakhsh valley who became one of that area's most powerful commanders, had served four years in prison for racketeering.<sup>262</sup> Ghaffor Mirzoyev 'gained a reputation as a cruel field commander with strong connections in the criminal world in Tajikistan and Russia'.<sup>263</sup> The PFT also benefited from having a number of kolkhoz and district government chairmen in Kurgan-Tyube as field commanders, as their ready-made solidarity groupings allowed them to tap into organised sources of fighters and resources in the heavily contested Kurgan-Tyube region.<sup>264</sup> Finally, the most notorious of the Hissari field commanders was Ibodullo Boimatov, a half-Uzbek mafia figure who utilised his illicit connections in Uzbekistan (for example, with the Uzbek mafia boss 'Salimboi-bacha') to acquire arms and armoured vehicles for the PFT.<sup>265</sup> Like a number of other field commanders, Boimatov had been a driver before the war (running a bus route between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). Akiner notes that this occupation gave the men mobility, enhanced information-gathering, and more opportunities for building networks, all of which would prove useful when war broke out.<sup>266</sup>

On the other side, the IRP was also arming its followers in the countryside (with assistance from Afghan warlords Ahmad Shah Massoud and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar).<sup>267</sup> Russian Border Troops reported repeated confrontations at the Afghan border, as Tajiks and Afghans attempted to smuggle small arms and ammunition into the country.<sup>268</sup> Some Pamiri MVD units – already equipped and armed – abandoned any pretence of 'restoring order' and fought on behalf of the opposition.<sup>269</sup> The nominal umbrella organisation for the opposition units was the

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<sup>261</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 114. According to some accounts, Saidov's wife and children were also gruesomely murdered. Rubin (1993), 79. See also: Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh (2002), 183; Kilavuz (2007), 181.

<sup>262</sup> Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh (2002), 184; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23/1/93.

<sup>263</sup> Marat (2006), 106.

<sup>264</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 702. See also Kuzmin (2001), 184.

<sup>265</sup> Matveeva (2009), 21; BBC/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19/12/92.

<sup>266</sup> Akiner (2001), 43.

<sup>267</sup> Tousley (1995).

<sup>268</sup> BBC/Russia TV, 23/6/92; BBC/Russia TV, 9/7/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 14/8/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/9/92.

<sup>269</sup> See, for example, Nourzhanov (2005), 115.

Front for the Salvation of the Homeland (also referred to as the Committee for National Salvation), created on 21 June 1992 and headed by DPT leader Shadman Yusuf.<sup>270</sup>

Initially, forces on both sides were organised within local 'headquarters', featuring various local power brokers (such as police chiefs, administrative officials and religious figures), who were supposed to direct the activities of these local 'self-defence units'. However, the headquarters proved largely inept at organising anything beyond defensive operations and incapable of providing basic necessities to the population, and field commanders on both sides took charge, rapidly acquiring significant authority and status.<sup>271</sup>

With no national army to restore order, these self-defence units confronted each other across Kurgan-Tyube. During the summer of 1992, the war was to a large extent a 'war of the kolkhozy'.<sup>272</sup> By 20 June, it was reported, the region had been carved into 'influence spheres' by armed groups on both sides.<sup>273</sup> As Matveeva writes, 'When civil war broke out, defences were organised along kolkhoz boundaries, with groups who were a minority in a given kolkhoz fleeing for protection of a kolkhoz where 'their' group was in majority (for example, Gharmis in a majority Kulyabi kolkhoz)'.<sup>274</sup> Olivier Roy provides a more detailed explanation, using the key Turkmenistan kolkhoz as an example:

*The Gharmis were in the majority and the kolkhoz was an opposition stronghold (Mullah Nuri had a mosque there). The Kulyabis, who were in the minority, lived in the mahalla of Maskinabad. In June 1992, the Gharmis expelled the Kulyabis, who went over to the Moskwa kolkhoz, which was majority Kulyabi. The territorial limits of the two kolkhoz became the front line in the fighting that lasted from June to November 1992, with the digging of trenches and the mounting of ambushes, until Kulyabi troops arrived from the north and retook the Turkmenistan kolkhoz in November.*<sup>275</sup>

It is worth recalling here the relatively homogenous composition of settlements in the south.

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<sup>270</sup> Olimova (1999). Auten (1996) translates the organisation's name as the 'Front for National Salvation'; BBC translations of contemporary media accounts call it the Committee for National Salvation. BBC/Tajik Radio, 26/6/92(b).

<sup>271</sup> Akiner (2006), 13; Nourzhanov (2005), 116; BBC/Mayak Radio, 8/9/92. See also: Kaldor (2007), 98-99.

<sup>272</sup> Roy (2007), 95. See also: UPI, 28/6/92; BBC/Russia's Radio, 30/6/92; BBC/Ostankino, 2/7/92; *Moscow News*, 2/7/92.

<sup>273</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/6/92.

<sup>274</sup> Matveeva (2009), 13.

<sup>275</sup> The kolkhoz remained in Kulyabi hands after the war, and was renamed the Haqiqat (Truth) kolkhoz. Roy (2007), 95.



By one estimate, only 20 per cent of villages in Kurgan-Tyube were evenly mixed with residents of Gharmi and Kulyabi origin; the rest had a strong majority of one with a smaller minority of the other (in addition to some villages which were largely Uzbek).<sup>276</sup> This facilitated the mobilisation of militias as well as targeting decisions: according to field research by Kilavuz, villages whose residents were of mixed origin (Gharmi/Kulyabi) were able to avoid violence longer than more homogenous villages:

*Some informants reported that in evenly split villages, when the Kulyabi fighters came, the Kulyabi members of the kolkhoz talked to them and convinced them not to attack their village. When Garmi fighters came, the Garmi members of the village did the same thing. In this way they were able to remain outside of the fighting for a long time.*<sup>277</sup>

It appears, however, that only one or two villages in Kurgan-Tyube were able to maintain neutrality and avoid violence throughout this phase of the war.<sup>278</sup>

Opposition militias also managed to impose a 'blockade' on the Kulyab region. This was easier to accomplish than one might expect: much of the region was linked to the capital and to Kurgan-Tyube by only a handful of roads, due to the mountainous terrain.<sup>279</sup> Whilst this succeeded in cutting off supplies to Kulyab – including food, which quickly raised fears of famine – the blockade also antagonised further the Kulyabi faction and bolstered their legitimising narratives of self-defence.

The opposition also still controlled Dushanbe. In late August, hundreds of protesters (many of them refugees from the southern regions) seized control of the presidential palace and took hostages, demanding an end to the conflict and the resignation of Nabiev.<sup>280</sup> On 7 September, Nabiev attempted to fly to Khujand but was blocked from leaving by 'opposition forces'. Their identity was murky; whilst many referred to them simply as 'opposition members' (a safe enough assumption) other observers at the time and since claimed they were actually members of the Youths of Dushanbe City, a criminal-political collective.<sup>281</sup> After several hours

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<sup>276</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 703.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 703; Slim and Hodizoda (2002), 3.

<sup>279</sup> Naumkin (2005), 220; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/6/92. On the blockade, see also: US Department of State (1993); BBC/Tajik Radio, 15/9/92; BBC/Multiple sources, 28/9/92; BBC/Mayak Radio, 12/10/92.

<sup>280</sup> *Washington Post*, 1/9/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/9/92; AP, 3/9/92.

<sup>281</sup> Claims that criminals were involved can be found in Rashid (2003), 178; Azamova (1992); Matveeva (2009), 18; Kuzmin (2001), 190. Nourzhanov (2005) and Akiner (2001) claim that Nabiev was captured and forced to resign by members of the Youth of Dushanbe City. Reuters and Interfax also reported at the time that the Youth were involved. Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 14/10/92; Reuters, 8/9/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/9/92(a).

of 'discussions', Nabiev signed a letter of resignation, apparently under duress. Akbarsho Iskandarov, the centrist parliamentary speaker from Badakhshan, became acting president. Dushanbe became increasingly unstable and violent, as former communist members of the coalition government fled, more radical members of the opposition grew in strength, and the city itself was carved up amongst paramilitary gangs.<sup>282</sup>

### 3.1.3 The Triumph of the PFT

The week-long drama in the capital provided the final spark to transform the low-intensity conflict in the south into all-out civil war. On 3 September, competing demonstrations in Kurgan-Tyube city descended into violence between Kulyabi and opposition militias, and the city quickly became the new front line in the conflict in the region. More than 100 people were reported killed that week, and thousands of refugees from the city surrounded the encampments of nearby Russian and CIS military units.<sup>283</sup> As Tajikistan prepared to celebrate the first anniversary of its declaration of independence, the official death toll from four months of violence in the southern regions exceeded 1,000 lives.<sup>284</sup>

On 6 September, for all intents and purposes, the Kulyabi militias 'declared war' on Kurgan-Tyube:

*...conservative leaders in Kulyab supporting President Rakhmon Nabyev have called on the people to take up arms against the opposition which controls Kurgan-Tyube... In a declaration read out on republican radio, the leader of Kulyab, Rustam Abdurakhimov, has said that weapons will be handed out to those who will fight with participants in unlawful actions in Kurgan-Tyube, where a state of emergency has been announced.*<sup>285</sup>

Abdurakhimov was not an official figure in the Kulyab regional government, but rather a field commander in the Kulyabi militias and a pre-war associate of Safarov (his identification as the Kulyab leader at this point in time is telling).<sup>286</sup> By 18 September, the situation was deteriorating rapidly, with armed clashes in the outskirts of Kurgan-Tyube city, at a number of

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<sup>282</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), xvi; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/9/92.

<sup>283</sup> BBC/Ostankino TV, 10/9/92; BBC/Mayak Radio, 7/9/92.

<sup>284</sup> *The Economist*, 12/9/92; *The Guardian*, 10/9/92.

<sup>285</sup> BBC/Radio Moscow, 8 September 1992.

<sup>286</sup> He would shortly join Kenjaev in a disastrous coup attempt in Dushanbe, and be executed by opposition forces. Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh (2002), 2; Kuzmin (2001), 178.

kolchozy in the region, and around the Russian military outpost at Lomonosovo.<sup>287</sup> A new front line opened between the city of Nurek, taken by Kulyabi militias, and Kofarnihon, an opposition stronghold a few dozen kilometres up the road to Dushanbe.<sup>288</sup>

Kulyabi PFT militias, after suffering numerous losses throughout September, gained a major advantage when they were able to seize four tanks from the Russian garrison at Lomonosovo. (Opposition forces claimed that the Russian unit allowed the Kulyabis to take the tanks and other weapons.<sup>289</sup>) The acquisition of even four tanks, in a conflict characterised by small arms and few defences, sharply escalated the fighting; as one observer noted, 'In such a poorly armed war, a single tank can make the difference between victory and defeat'.<sup>290</sup> The Kulyabi militia turned these tanks not toward military or government targets, but against the city of Kurgan-Tyube. In the ensuing destruction, hundreds were killed in the city, civilians fled the town en masse and opposition forces were forced to retreat.<sup>291</sup> By 6 October, Kulyabi forces had taken control of Kurgan-Tyube city, and began to expand their military activities southward.<sup>292</sup>

By this time, it was impossible to say with any accuracy how many people had died. When asked to estimate the number of casualties, Deputy Premier Jamshed Karimov stated, 'I believe that today not a single competent body is able to say what the number is, as in conditions when management has been lost in most regions, it is practically impossible to count'.<sup>293</sup> As September drew to a close, officials in Kurgan-Tyube put the death toll in the conflict to date at 5,000 – a steep jump from the 1,000 deaths estimated at the beginning of the month.<sup>294</sup> The Tajik Red Crescent appealed for aid to cope with an estimated 200,000 internally displaced people, half of whom were children, as winter approached.<sup>295</sup> Of particular concern for the entire republic was the failure to bring in the annual cotton harvest (one of Tajikistan's key economic activities): only 155,000 tonnes had been collected through October, compared with 556,000 tonnes at the same time the previous year.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 21 September 1992; BBC/Itar-Tass, 22 September 1992; BBC/Tajik Radio, 25 September 1992.

<sup>288</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 26 September 1992.

<sup>289</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/9/92(a); BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/9/92(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/9/92; *Washington Post*, 24/10/94.

<sup>290</sup> Inter-Press Service, 9/10/92. This is a common dynamic in intrastate wars; see Kaldor (2007), 101-02.

<sup>291</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/9/92(b); *New York Times*, 30/9/92.

<sup>292</sup> RPD/*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 6/10/92; BBC World Service, 2/10/92; BBC/Ostankino TV, 30/9/92; BBC/Russia's Radio, 12/10/92; BBC/Ostankino TV, 20/10/92.

<sup>293</sup> Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 14/10/92.

<sup>294</sup> BBC/Ostankino TV, 1/10/92.

<sup>295</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/10/92.

<sup>296</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 23/10/92.

In early October, Safarov and Kenjaev apparently agreed on a tactical alliance, uniting the Kulyabi and Hissari militias under the banner of the Popular Front of Tajikistan.<sup>297</sup> On 24 October 1992, Kenjaev helped lead 1,500 PFT militiamen, accompanied by tanks and armoured vehicles, from Tursunzade into Dushanbe and seized the city centre with little resistance.<sup>298</sup> Opposition armed forces initially retreated to Kofarnihon, but by the end of the day ‘fierce fighting’ broke out in Dushanbe as militiamen flooded into the city to combat the coup.<sup>299</sup> Russian TV called the battle ‘nothing less than a slaughter’, with civilians caught in the crossfire.<sup>300</sup> General Ashurov of the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> MRD brokered talks between the opposing sides, and in the end they agreed to convene a special parliamentary session to discuss a political solution to the conflict. PFT militiamen were partly disarmed and allowed to leave Dushanbe.<sup>301</sup> It was estimated that 100-500 people, including civilians, had been killed in the city during the two days of fighting.<sup>302</sup>

Akbarzadeh claims the coup attempt was the first attack on Dushanbe following Uzbekistan’s decision to allow PFT forces to discreetly use their territory for training and organising attacks on the capital.<sup>303</sup> Others observed at the time that Uzbek support was hardly discreet, as most of the prisoners taken in the battle were Uzbek and the buses that carried Kenjaev’s forces into the capital had license plates from the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan.<sup>304</sup> Uzbek state support for the PFT was largely a function of: 1) antipathy toward political Islamist movements such as the IRP, given the strong Islamic activist currents within the Uzbek portion of Ferghana; 2) the desire to champion Uzbek minorities in Tajikistan, who were targeted by opposition forces and anxious about the Tajik nationalism they espoused; and 3) the fear that a nationalist Tajik regime would agitate for the return of Samarkand and Bukhara.<sup>305</sup>

Despite the failed coup, during the first ten days of November the PFT made significant gains – thanks largely to improved weaponry and armoured capability, and covert support from Uzbekistan – that consolidated its hold on the southern districts and extended its reach into the southwestern corner of the republic. The long-contested Turkmenistan kolkhoz in Vakhsh

<sup>297</sup> Akiner (2001), 38; Nourzhanov (2005), 117; Human Rights Watch (1993), xviii. In the literature, conflicting dates are given for the formation of the PFT (from June to October); this may reflect the distinction between its organisation as a group and its official registration in October.

<sup>298</sup> Note that Safarov did not approve of the coup attempt, believing it premature. *Washington Post*, 25/10/92; *New York Times*, 25/10/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 26/10/92(b); BBC/Tajik Radio, 27/10/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 28/10/92(b); AP, 2/11/92.

<sup>299</sup> *The Independent*, 25/10/92; *New York Times*, 25/10/92; AP, 2/11/92.

<sup>300</sup> BBC/Multiple sources, 28/10/92(a); BBC/Tajik Radio, 27/10/92.

<sup>301</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 27/10/92(a); *The Guardian*, 26/10/92; *New York Times*, 26/10/92.

<sup>302</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 10; BBC/Interfax, 27/10/92; *New York Times*, 26/10/92; AP, 2/11/92.

<sup>303</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1126.

<sup>304</sup> *Moscow News*, 29/10/92.

<sup>305</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1113, 1123; Auten (1996), 202; Rubin (1993), 80; Akiner (2001), 48; Tadjbakhsh (2008), 21; Payne (1996), 103; Lynch (2001), 55.

and the towns of Kolkhozabad to the south were captured.<sup>306</sup> The Pyanj and Kumsangir districts on the Afghan border, home to some of the last opposition holdouts in the south, were attacked in a major offensive.<sup>307</sup> The PFT also pushed into the southwestern districts of Kabodiyen and Shaartuz, creating a new wave of refugees which flooded into Dushanbe (bringing the total number of refugees in the country to an estimated 400,000).<sup>308</sup> Itar-Tass published estimates that at this point Safarov had between 5,000 and 10,000 militants at his disposal, rampaging around southern Tajikistan.<sup>309</sup> Closer to the capital, clashes were reported in the outskirts of Dushanbe and in Hissar. The Hissar-Dushanbe railroad line was blown up, cutting the capital off from vitally needed food supplies and bringing Central Asian rail traffic to a halt.<sup>310</sup>

The rapid gains made by the PFT gave it a strong political position leading into the special parliamentary session that had been negotiated during the failed October coup. Convened in Khujand on 16 November, this two-week session radically changed the political situation in the republic. The assembly approved the transformation of Tajikistan into a parliamentary republic, with the parliamentary chairman serving as head of state.<sup>311</sup> Safarov apparently exercised his influence in the selection of a new government, rejecting Nabiev as 'too weak'.<sup>312</sup> Parliament then chose Emomali Rahmonov, a Communist Party official from Kulyab, as the new Tajik head of state. Rahmonov had served as chairman of the Kulyab Regional Executive Committee for less than a month, after his predecessor was allegedly personally killed by Safarov.<sup>313</sup> Born in Danghara, he had grown up in Safarov's *mahalla* and was widely seen as 'a tool in the hands of Safarov'.<sup>314</sup> As of 2013, however, he still serves as Tajik president.

The new government was dominated by Kulyabis – a major shift in the political dynamics of Tajikistan, considering the historical dominance of Leninabad, but an unsurprising one given the leverage enjoyed by the Kulyabi faction. As noted by Rubin, 'Those who held the guns, rather than those who controlled the factories and party personnel committees, came out on

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<sup>306</sup> Itar-Tass, 5/11/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/11/92(b).

<sup>307</sup> Atkin (1997b), 292; US Department of State (1993); BBC/Interfax, 2/11/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/11/92(b); BBC/Interfax, 11/11/92.

<sup>308</sup> BBC/Interfax, 10/11/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 11/11/92. This offensive may have been spurred by the desperate need for food and supplies, as the southwestern districts had not been ravaged by conflict yet. Naumkin (2005), 221.

<sup>309</sup> Itar-Tass, 5/11/92.

<sup>310</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/11/92(a); RPD/*Izvestia*, 6/11/92; BBC/Multiple sources, 13/11/92.

<sup>311</sup> This change was initiated largely because of the 'intense controversy' over selecting a new president. The office of president was recreated in 1994. Atkin (1997b), 309.

<sup>312</sup> AFP, 20/11/92; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 21/11/92.

<sup>313</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 117; Kilavuz (2007), 190; BBC/Tajik Radio, 29/10/92(b); RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14/11/92; BBC/Russia's Radio, 18/11/92.

<sup>314</sup> RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 21/11/92; Nourzhanov (2005), 129.

top'.<sup>315</sup> The inclusion of such individuals as Yaqub Salimov – a well-known criminal and Kulyabi PFT commander, who was now appointed Interior Minister – also indicated where power lay at this stage of the conflict. Gharmis and Pamiris were largely excluded from the power-sharing arrangements, losing all the gains they had mustered with the GNR coalition. Parliament also decided to approve a measure that would merge Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab into a single administrative region ('Khatlon') with its centre in Kurgan-Tyube city. However, it is probably more accurate to say that Kulyab, victorious in war, annexed Kurgan-Tyube. Kurgan-Tyube's cotton and agricultural operations were very attractive to the relatively poorer Kulyab region, and the merger would also dilute Uzbek dominance in Kurgan-Tyube.<sup>316</sup>

The day after the new government was agreed, hundreds were reported killed by Kulyabi forces. The town of Shaartuz was attacked by Kulyabi fighters with tanks (reportedly accompanied by Uzbek helicopters and armoured vehicles), prompting thousands of refugees and opposition militia to flee toward the Afghan border.<sup>317</sup> By December, 150,000 Tajiks were living in miserable refugee conditions along both sides of the Tajik-Afghan border; hundreds were dying of cold and hunger, or from drowning in the icy Amu Darya river trying to flee the fighting.<sup>318</sup> More than half a million refugees suffered within Tajikistan, out of reach of international aid agencies.<sup>319</sup> Dushanbe also remained dangerously unstable, with the economic blockade of the capital now stretching into weeks and sporadic gunfire and artillery attacks in the western outskirts of the city.<sup>320</sup>

On 10 December, Dushanbe fell to the PFT. Yaqub Salimov, the new interior minister and PFT field commander, led an armoured convoy out of Hissar and into Dushanbe, largely unhindered.<sup>321</sup> The official element of the armed group was an 'Interior Ministry special-purpose battalion', recently formed in Termez, Uzbekistan, comprising former MVD and KGB units that had fought in Salimov's PFT militia or otherwise remained loyal to the pro-communist cause; additional PFT militia entered the city alongside them.<sup>322</sup> Tanks and armoured vehicles were rumoured to have been provided by the Uzbek government, but may have been acquired illicitly from Uzbek sources by the Tursunzade field commander, Ibodullo

<sup>315</sup> Rubin (1998), 129. See also Asadullaev (2001), 24.

<sup>316</sup> Bleuer (2007), 36; Kosach (1995), 137; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 57.

<sup>317</sup> As in other conflicts (Sri Lanka, Rwanda), militiamen used the refugees as 'human shields' to escape the fighting. BBC/Interfax, 27/11/92; RPD/*Izvestia*, 9/12/92; BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16/12/92; AFP, 23/11/92; AFP, 22/11/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/11/92; Reuters, 23/11/92; *Moscow News*, 22/1/93.

<sup>318</sup> UPI, 10/10/92; AFP, 3/12/92(b); AFP, 8/12/92; UPI, 8/12/92; AP, 28/12/92(b).

<sup>319</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 3/12/92; Reuters, 7/12/92.

<sup>320</sup> RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 3/12/92; AP, 4/12/92(b); RPD/*Izvestia*, 4/12/92; BBC/Interfax, 5/12/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 10/12/92(a); AP, 6/12/92; AP, 4/12/92(a).

<sup>321</sup> AP, 10/12/92; BBC/Multiple sources, 12/12/92; AP, 11/12/92; BBC/*Kommersant*, 19/12/92.

<sup>322</sup> The KGB was the Tajik successor to the Soviet-era KGB. Matveeva (2009), 26; BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15/12/92; BBC/*Izvestiya*, 14/1/93; *Moscow News*, 22/1/93.

Boimatov. Observers also reported seeing Uzbek soldiers guarding installations in Dushanbe and, later, Uzbek aircraft assisting in operations against opposition militia (the appearance of combat aircraft constituted the clearest evidence of Uzbek state involvement, as Tajikistan did not possess such airpower itself). Salimov's forces quickly took control of key government buildings and sites, and several hours later Rahmonov flew into the city to formally assume his duties as head of state.<sup>323</sup> Opposition militia that escaped from Dushanbe intact fled to Gharm, or south toward the Afghan border; hundreds of PFT militiamen pursued them in both directions.<sup>324</sup>

The PFT takeover of Dushanbe led to months of atrocities and 'ethnic cleansing' in the capital. The US Department of State Human Rights Report stated that 'armed pro-government gangs began combing the capital for people originating from the regions of Garm or Badakhshan, kidnapping and killing many. The new Government spoke out against these acts of retribution but did not act effectively to control them'.<sup>325</sup> Officials at Amnesty International stated that they had

*received what we regard as reliable and consistent reports from a number of sources that in and around Dushanbe, in the period from 10 December [1992] to approximately the end of February, scores, possibly hundreds of people, most of them unarmed civilians, had been extrajudicially executed either by government law-enforcement personnel or by pro-government paramilitary forces, or had 'disappeared' after being taken into custody by such forces. The victims were reported to be mainly people originating from the Garm district or from Gorny Badakhshan...*<sup>326</sup>

Essentially, the PFT and other paramilitary forces who entered Dushanbe wreaked their revenge on Gharmis and Pamiris, setting up dozens of roadblocks throughout the city and killing, raping and torturing civilians. Estimates of the final death toll ranged from 2,000 to 5,000.<sup>327</sup> Casualty figures, always difficult to accurately compile in any conflict, were made more so in this instance by the fact that civilians were usually taken away for 'interrogation'

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<sup>323</sup> BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15/12/92.

<sup>324</sup> Dailey (1994), 17; BBC/Multiple sources, 12/12/92; BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15/12/92; AFP, 18/12/92; AFP, 21/12/92; AFP, 22/12/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 22/12/92; AFP, 23/12/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 24/12/92; AFP, 29/12/92; UPI, 29/12/92; *Moscow News*, 22/1/93.

<sup>325</sup> US Department of State (1993).

<sup>326</sup> Quoted in Gorvin (1997), 230.

<sup>327</sup> Rashid (2003), 182; Gorvin (1997), 230.

before being shot, and not all bodies were publicly discarded in the city streets or outskirts (some victims were taken to Hissar before being killed).<sup>328</sup>

At the end of December, Rahmonov announced that 20,000 people had died in the civil war overall, a figure impossible to verify but seemingly within the bounds of probability.<sup>329</sup> A week later, however, Russian television would announce the death toll as 60,000, and shortly after that an independent human rights organisation in Tajikistan claimed 100,000 people had died.<sup>330</sup> Such announcements demonstrated the degree to which casualty estimates were still largely guesses; unfortunately, the passage of time would not improve their credibility, as there is still no agreement today on how many people died in Tajikistan in 1992.

### **3.1.4 Regime Consolidation and the Dissolution of the PFT**

The 'hot' phase of the war was seemingly winding down, with opposition militias in full retreat into the Pamir mountains and northern Afghanistan, but armed clashes and retributive civilian victimisation continued. At this time, Safarov was estimated to command at least 35,000 militiamen, by far the most powerful military force in the country.<sup>331</sup> His stature in the new regime was signalled by his appearances alongside President Rahmonov in TV programmes addressing security issues, and Rahmonov publicly stated that it was only due to the PFT that his regime had come into power.<sup>332</sup> In mid-December, Rahmonov announced that the new Tajik national army would be based on the structures of the PFT.<sup>333</sup> The rationale for this was two-fold: it would provide the national army with experienced and well-armed fighters whilst also bringing the irregular fighters and their weapons under state control.

In January 1993, the official narrative focused on 'life returning to normal' for Tajiks throughout the country. Refugees began to return to their homes, the railways reopened, and phone lines to the south were restored.<sup>334</sup> Rahmonov informed his Central Asian neighbours that Tajikistan no longer required peacekeepers, but humanitarian aid.<sup>335</sup> Yet violence and instability continued to plague the republic. The disarmament of armed groups – a key requirement for stabilisation yet difficult to achieve in an environment of continued violence

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<sup>328</sup> There was also the additional factor, complicating casualty figures throughout the conflict, that 'in accordance with Eastern custom it is usual to bury corpses on the same day'. BBC/Ostankino TV, 2/7/92; AFP, 23/12/92.

<sup>329</sup> AP, 28/12/92(b).

<sup>330</sup> BBC/Ostankino TV, 6/1/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/1/93; *New York Times*, 10/1/93.

<sup>331</sup> AP, 28/12/92(b).

<sup>332</sup> Kayani (2006), 157; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23/1/93; AP, 28/12/92(b); AP, 16/2/93.

<sup>333</sup> AFP, 18/12/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 6/1/93; BBC/Interfax, 27/1/93.

<sup>334</sup> UPI, 4/1/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 5/1/93; BBC/Interfax, 5/1/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 5/1/93(f); BBC/Tajik Radio, 14/1/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/1/93(b); BBC/Interfax, 16/1/93(a).

<sup>335</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 5/1/93(c); AFP, 6/1/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 16/1/93.



and crime – failed miserably, with only 4 per cent of the estimated 30,000 illicit weapons in the country surrendered to authorities before a 4 January deadline.<sup>336</sup> The Tajik-Afghan border region remained unstable, with tens of thousands of refugees still camping (and dying) on both sides of the border and continued attempts at infiltration by militants from the Afghan side.<sup>337</sup> Despite the successes announced by the government, conditions were poor even in pro-government areas: Khujand, for example, reintroduced rationing, and Kulyabis were suffering from disease and malnutrition.<sup>338</sup>

By March, however, Rahmonov felt secure enough to order the disbanding of armed militias (including the PFT) and the return of refugees to their homes.<sup>339</sup> Safarov acceded to both measures. In support of the first, he publicly urged armed groups to disarm and return to a peaceful life or join the new Tajik army.<sup>340</sup> Whilst this indicated the official end of the PFT as an armed group – an existence that was somewhat illusory to begin with, given the high level of autonomy of its constituent militias – its field commanders and members would continue to operate jointly and play a pivotal role in the armed conflict going forward, as shown in the following sections.

Not all the PFT field commanders were content with the subsiding of hostilities. Faisali Saidov did not approve of the return of Gharmi and Pamiri refugees to Kurgan-Tyube and would not be dissuaded from conducting ethnic cleansing operations, which complicated refugee repatriation.<sup>341</sup> In this, he was supported by a number of other PFT commanders who resisted the return of refugees both from a desire for revenge and from more pecuniary motivations: as the victors in the war, they felt entitled to claim resources and political positions in the southern regions, a process that would be impeded by the return of refugees to their homes.<sup>342</sup> On 29 March, Safarov arranged to meet Saidov in Kurgan-Tyube, presumably to discuss their dispute. In a shocking development, the two men quarrelled, one man drew a weapon on the other, and in the massive shootout that followed Safarov, Saidov and seven to fifteen bodyguards were killed.<sup>343</sup> The government declared 31 March to be a day of mourning, and thousands in Kulyab grieved the loss of their Bobo Sangak, who had protected them from

<sup>336</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/1/93(a); BBC/Ostankino TV, 8/1/93.

<sup>337</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 5/1/93(h).

<sup>338</sup> RPD/*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 4/2/93; AP, 18/1/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 23/1/93(b); BBC/Tajik Radio, 23/1/93(c).

<sup>339</sup> Rubin (1993), 82; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/4/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 4/6/93.

<sup>340</sup> BBC/Interfax, 17/3/93(a); Itar-Tass, 16/3/93; Itar-Tass, 19/3/93.

<sup>341</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 118; Roy (2007), 49; Atkin (1997b), 301; Inter-Press Service, 2/4/93.

<sup>342</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 174; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(a).

<sup>343</sup> For accounts of the shooting and its aftermath, see: Nourzhanov (2005), 118; AP, 30/3/93(a); Reuters, 30/3/93; AP, 30/3/93(b); Itar-Tass, 31/3/93(a); Reuters, 31/3/93; *The Independent*, 31/3/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/3/93; AP, 31/3/93.

men seemingly even worse than himself (Rahmonov reportedly attended both funerals and 'could not control his tears').<sup>344</sup>

The regime nevertheless moved forward with the creation of new national security forces, with significant help from Russia and Uzbekistan.<sup>345</sup> Russia was concerned, first and foremost, about maintaining some semblance of control along the Tajik-Afghan border, the first line of defence against the Islamist militants and organised narcotics trade emanating from Afghanistan and South Asia (once past the Tajik border, both militants and criminals had few impediments in crossing the Central Asian republics and entering Russian territory).<sup>346</sup> In addition, emerging Russian policy on the 'near abroad' prioritised the protection of Russian populations and the maintenance of relative stability in the former republics. This security assistance was emblematic of the wider net of financial assistance provided by Russia and Uzbekistan to the faltering Tajik state. Western diplomats at the time estimated that 50 to 70 per cent of the Tajik state budget was funded by Russia, and some considered Tajikistan at this point to be virtually a Russian-Uzbek protectorate.<sup>347</sup> Rahmonov himself said that if not for 'Russia and Boris Yeltsin personally, and Uzbekistan and Islam Karimov personally, then Tajikistan would already have ceased to exist'.<sup>348</sup>

Finally, the regime reached a new political accommodation with the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region in March 1993, according to which the Pamiris would disarm illegal militias and forgo any moves toward greater sovereignty, whilst the regime would resume the provision of essential goods and refrain from sending state or paramilitary forces to the region (with the exception of Russian Border Troops).<sup>349</sup> This agreement was to some extent mere window dressing: government forces could not access the Pamir highlands for much of the year anyway, and the region enjoyed a sort of *de facto* sovereignty during the following years, surviving on the proceeds from narco-trafficking and humanitarian aid from the Aga Khan Foundation.<sup>350</sup> However, Rahmonov also had to cope with a new source of instability: rebellious elites and popular anger in Leninabad. Frustration with the appointment of Kulyabis to northern political and security posts, alongside continued dire living conditions, led to mass demonstrations and unrest (culminating in a 1997 assassination attempt on Rahmonov in

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<sup>344</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/4/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/4/93(c); *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>345</sup> Rubin (1993), 82; Lynch (2001), 57; Heathershaw (2001), 31; Human Rights Watch (1993), xxii; *The Independent*, 8/2/93; RPD/*Rossiiskiy vestnik*, 10/2/93; Inter-Press Service, 2/4/93; BBC/*Rossiya*, 9/4/93.

<sup>346</sup> The border was also named by Rahmonov as the top priority of the Tajik government. Inter-Press Service, 2/4/93; BBC/Interfax, 18/2/93(b); AFP, 17/7/93(b); Official Kremlin Broadcast, 20/7/93(a); RPD/*Pravda*, 24/7/93; AFP, 26/7/93; RPD/*Izvestia*, 4/8/93.

<sup>347</sup> Rubin (1993), 81-82; Human Rights Watch (1993), xx; Roy (2007), 142.

<sup>348</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), xx.

<sup>349</sup> Rubin (1993), 81-82; Kuzmin (2001), 177; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/4/93(b); BBC/Tajik Radio, 12/5/93.

<sup>350</sup> Roy (2007), 141; Matveeva (2009), 29; Galeotti (1995), 69; UN Security Council Report (September 1995), 3.

Khujand).<sup>351</sup> Some even threatened secession, which was somewhat plausible given the economic power of Leninabad and its close ties with Uzbekistan, but Russian opposition to any moves that might lead to the breakup of the Tajik state kept Leninabad in check and tensions at a low boil.<sup>352</sup>

Phase I of the civil war essentially drew to a close in the spring of 1993, with Kulyabi victory in the capital and the southern regions, the opposition forces in retreat and disarray, and Rahmonov's initial attempts at regime consolidation solidly backed by Russia and Uzbekistan. Members of the PFT, no longer a formal entity, melted into the new political and security structures, their illicit and profitable connections intact. Yet the lack of a political settlement between the regime and the opposition, and the imminent resurgence of opposition militias, meant that the war could not truly be said to have ended. Instead, it entered a new phase of asymmetric warfare and warlord challengers to the regime, as the following section details.

### **3.2 Phase II: 1993 – 1997**

Phase II of the Tajik civil war was characterised by irregular warfare and asymmetric stalemate between the Kulyabi regime and Islamist opposition forces, and by continuing political and security challenges to the regime by field commanders and warlords. PFT members were involved in the former as members of the new Tajik security forces, and in the latter as some of the most powerful warlords and private militias that foiled regime consolidation efforts. Both facets are described in this section.

After consolidating control of Dushanbe, the new Kulyabi regime sought to eliminate opposition forces – but it proved impossible to destroy their bases within the commanding heights of the Pamirs and politically problematic to pursue them across the border into Afghanistan. The most intense fighting of the civil war was over, but the conflict did not end: Rahmonov's regime fully controlled only 40 per cent of Tajik territory.<sup>353</sup> Government security forces came under frequent attack in the east and at the border, and hundreds of Tajik politicians, policemen and Russian servicemen were assassinated around Dushanbe.<sup>354</sup> Fighting

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<sup>351</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 123; Lubin, et al. (1999), 50-51; US Department of State (1997), 128; UN Security Council Reports: (June 1996), 2, (September 1996), 4; Human Rights Watch (1998); AFP, 15/5/96; AP, 15/5/96; BBC/Khovar, 15/5/96; BBC/Interfax, 1/8/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 3/8/96.

<sup>352</sup> Roy (2007), 141-42; Akiner (2001), 39-40.

<sup>353</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 954.

<sup>354</sup> On terrorist attacks and targeted killings in and around Dushanbe, see: UN Security Council Reports, June 1994 and December 1995; US Department of State (1996), 106; BBC/Tajik Radio, 24/1/94; UPI, 9/3/94; AFP, 11/3/94; AFP, 11/4/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/4/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/6/94; AFP, 15/6/94; *Washington Post*, 16/6/94; UPI, 21/6/94; AFP, 23/6/94; UPI, 24/7/94; AFP, 27/7/94; *Prague Post*, 24/8/94; AP, 15/9/94; AP, 6/10/94; AP, 31/12/94;

generally followed a seasonal pattern, intensifying in the spring and summer and receding in the winter, when mountain passes and roads were closed by snow and movement throughout much of the country was restricted.<sup>355</sup>

IRP leaders formed a new entity, the Movement of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (MIRT), to incorporate the broad range of Islamists opposed to the regime and to develop additional sources of foreign support. Led by Said Abdullo Nuri, its main base of operation was northern Afghanistan, in particular the Kunduz and Takhar provinces.<sup>356</sup> It is during this phase of the war – exile in Afghanistan – that the Islamist opposition is commonly seen as becoming more militant, even radical, but not wholly fundamentalist or Wahhabist.<sup>357</sup> Later, opposition leaders created an umbrella organisation, comprising both Islamist and non-Islamist groups, called the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which represented the opposition in peace negotiations with the Tajik regime. (The date of its founding is variously reported as 1993 or 1994.<sup>358</sup>) For the sake of consistency, opposition armed forces will be referred to as UTO forces throughout this chapter.

From Afghanistan, the UTO dispatched fighters through a series of interlocking valleys to mountain bases in the Karategin and Tavildara valleys in Tajikistan (an arduous four-day journey on foot) and recruited new members from among the 60,000 Tajik refugees still scattered across Afghanistan's northern provinces.<sup>359</sup> As of early 1993, they claimed to have thousands of men under arms (outside estimates ranged from 4,000 to 30,000).<sup>360</sup> They received training, arms and funding from Afghan warlords, Arab groups posing as 'relief organisations', state actors such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, and the proceeds from narco-trafficking.<sup>361</sup> From all appearances, the Islamists appreciated the limits of their military action: they did not have enough men, military capacity or popular support to depose the regime in Dushanbe.<sup>362</sup> Thus, their aim in perpetuating

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AFP, 24/4/95(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/4/95; BBC/Interfax, 15/5/95; AP, 18/5/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 30/5/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/6/95; AFP, 23/6/95; RPD/*Pravda*, 1/7/95; AP, 1/7/95; BBC/Interfax, 8/7/95; AP, 11/7/95; AFP, 2/8/95; AP, 21/8/95; AP, 28/9/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/10/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/10/95(b); AP, 15/10/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 18/10/95(b); AP, 22/10/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/10/95; AP, 1/11/95; AP, 3/11/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/11/95; BBC/Interfax, 20/11/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 30/11/95; *The Guardian*, 14/12/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/12/95.

<sup>355</sup> Tousley (1995), 40; Akiner (2001), 40. Mountain passes tended to become accessible again in April. See also, BBC/Mayak Radio, 17/3/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/5/94; Inter-Press Service, 1/8/94; AP, 17/8/94.

<sup>356</sup> Rubin (1993), 84; Tousley (1995), 36.

<sup>357</sup> Rubin (1993), 71; *Christian Science Monitor*, 26/1/93; Interviews (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>358</sup> For example, Akiner claims 1993 whilst the Olimovs say 1994, and many authors fail to note any date at all. Contemporary media reportage rarely referred to either the MIRT or the UTO, generally preferring to use 'the Islamist opposition'.

<sup>359</sup> Rubin (1993), 82; Tousley (1995), 30; *The Guardian*, 7/6/94.

<sup>360</sup> AP, 23/1/93; BBC, 23/1/93; Inter-Press Service, 12/4/93.

<sup>361</sup> Rubin (1993), 83-85; Tousley (1995), 35-36; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 49; AP, 7/4/93; AFP, 14/7/93(b); BBC/Interfax, 23/7/93(b).

<sup>362</sup> Roy (1997), 141; Tousley (1995), 30; Ruesch (1994), 3.

consistent small-scale attacks against military targets was to generate political pressure on the regime and its Russian patrons, with the ultimate objective of securing a political solution that would allow their return to Tajikistan. According to Lynch,

*The UTO was aware that it could not 'win' through military means. In 1995, Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda made this position clear: 'When we mention that we will continue our struggle and when we talk of military activity, we mean that we will only use our military operations as a lever to pressure Russia and the regime in Dushanbe to find a political solution.'*<sup>363</sup>

Negotiations thus became a new variable driving and shaping the continued violence. Whilst they were a welcome development on the political and diplomatic front, each round of talks was heralded by a wave of assassinations, border incursions and government counter-offensives.<sup>364</sup>

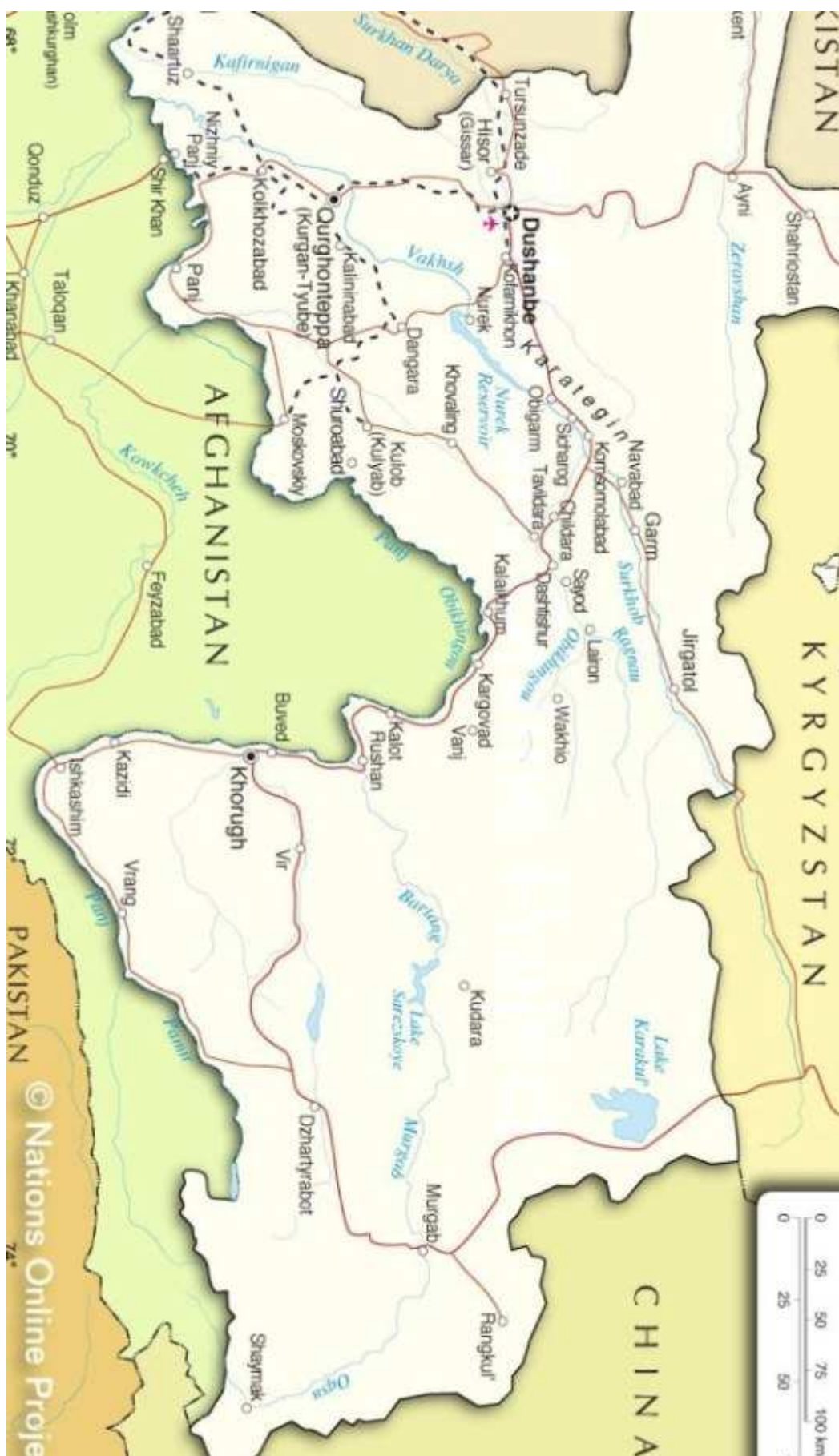
The following sections elaborate the ongoing conflict at the Tajik-Afghan border and in the mountains of eastern Tajikistan, and the security challenge to the regime represented by PFT warlords. They thus establish the context within which PFT field commanders and members operated during Phase II of the war – both with and against the regime – in advance of more detailed discussion of their victimisation activities in this time period (in Chapter 4).

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<sup>363</sup> Lynch (2001), 56. See also: Olimova and Olimov (2001), 27; *Moscow News*, 15/2/96.

<sup>364</sup> *The Times*, 7/3/94; AFP, 11/3/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 11/6/94; BBC/Ostankino, 23/6/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/8/94(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/8/94(b); Inter-Press Service, 22/8/94; BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/8/94(a); AFP, 11/9/94(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 3/10/94(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 22/10/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 25/10/94; AFP, 3/1/95.

Map 3.1: Southern and Eastern Tajikistan<sup>365</sup>



<sup>365</sup> Source: Nations Online Project. <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/tajikistan-political-map.htm>

### 3.2.1 Guerrilla Warfare in Eastern Tajikistan

Eastern Tajikistan had been spared direct fighting during Phase I of the conflict, but this changed dramatically after the fall of Dushanbe and the eastward retreat of opposition militants into their mountainous valley strongholds (especially, the Karategin and Tavildara valleys). The continued presence of opposition militants in Karategin and Tavildara posed a significant problem to the government, not only because it precluded complete control of the republic's territory but because the valleys enjoyed an excellent strategic position along the major roads linking Dushanbe with Gorno-Badakhshan and southern Kyrgyzstan. In these mountainous valleys, UTO militias ambushed government forces, occasionally taking and killing hostages, and were subjected to artillery and air strikes in return.<sup>366</sup> Opposition field commanders directed terrorist and guerrilla operations involving groups of up to several hundred men, and maintained close ties with opposition forces in northern Afghanistan. The low-intensity conflict in the Gharm and Tavildara regions continued throughout Phase II, with an estimated 2,500 opposition militants engaged in ambushes and sporadic clashes with government security forces.<sup>367</sup>

The conflict in eastern Tajikistan reached its height in 1996, and played a key role in pushing the regime toward concessions in the peace negotiations. In January, as the Ashgabat round of peace talks reconvened, several hundred opposition militants launched a major offensive to try to capture Tavildara – officially, in response to government provocations; but more likely, to gain leverage at the negotiating table.<sup>368</sup> The opposition enjoyed significant military successes during the campaign and managed to control the town of Tavildara and the surrounding area for long stretches between May and August.<sup>369</sup> By September, hundreds of militants and troops had been killed, Tavildara had changed hands multiple times, and nearly

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<sup>366</sup> Inter-Press Service, 2/7/93; AFP, 10/9/93; BBC/Interfax, 10/9/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 9/10/93; UPI, 11/11/93; BBC/Russia's Radio, 12/11/93.

<sup>367</sup> On clashes and attacks in the Gharm and Tavildara regions, see: UN Security Council Reports: September 1995, December 1995, March 1996; ICRC News Release, 8 November 1996; AP, 12/5/95; AP, 15/5/95; BBC/Interfax, 6/6/95; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/7/95; AFP, 3/7/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/7/95(a); AP, 5/7/95; BBC/RIA, 8/7/95; AP, 11/7/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/7/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/7/95; UPI, 19/7/95; AFP, 19/7/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 18/8/95; AP, 20/8/95; AFP, 30/8/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/9/95; BBC/RIA, 8/9/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/10/95(b); AP, 15/10/95; AP, 16/10/95; AP, 23/10/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/11/95; UPI, 2/11/95; BBC/Interfax, 10/11/95; AFP, 18/11/95; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 28/11/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/12/95.

<sup>368</sup> UPI, 31/1/96; BBC/Interfax, 1/2/96; *Moscow News*, 25/7/96. On opposition aims in Tavildara, see: BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/8/96(a); BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26/8/96; AP, 12/9/96; BBC/Interfax, 13/9/96.

<sup>369</sup> Roy (2007), 47; Lynch (2001), 58; UN Security Council Reports: March 1996, June 1996; ICRC News Release, 27 June 1996; UPI, 1/2/96; AP, 8/2/96; BBC/Interfax, 2/2/96; BBC/Interfax, 4/2/96; AP, 5/2/96; UPI, 7/2/96; AP, 9/2/96(a); BBC/Interfax, 9/2/96; AFP, 9/2/96; *New York Times*, 10/2/96; AFP, 12/2/96; UPI, 14/2/96; *Moscow Times*, 15/2/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/2/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/3/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/3/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 14/3/96; AFP, 26/3/96; AP, 6/5/96; AFP, 12/5/96; UPI, 12/5/96; BBC/Interfax, 13/5/96; BBC/Interfax, 16/5/96; AFP, 17/5/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/5/96; AP, 20/5/96; BBC/Interfax, 22/5/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 27/5/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 29/5/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/6/96; UPI, 5/6/96; BBC/Interfax, 6/6/96; AFP, 8/6/96; AFP, 13/6/96; AFP, 19/6/96; AP, 24/6/96; AFP, 26/6/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/6/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 27/6/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 5/7/96; AFP, 6/7/96; AFP, 8/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 10/7/96.

all of its 4,500 residents had fled.<sup>370</sup> Opposition militias also went on the offensive in the Karategin Valley, capturing Jirgatal, Tajikabad and Komsomolabad in September.<sup>371</sup> However, a ceasefire – later known as the Gharm Protocol – was agreed on 16 September, with the government tacitly acknowledging opposition control of the Karategin Valley from Gharm to the Kyrgyz border, and the opposition agreeing to safe passage on the Dushanbe-Osh road running through the Karategin.<sup>372</sup>

In late October, however, fighting flared again.<sup>373</sup> Militants repeatedly clashed with locally deployed government troops in eastern Tajikistan, with each side accusing the other of provocation. By early December, the opposition controlled a string of major district seats along the Dushanbe-Osh highway, from Komsomolabad in the west to Jirgatal in the east – and enjoyed a simultaneous political success, as an influential Leninabadi opposition party agreed to cooperate with the UTO against the Kulyabi-dominated regime. This set the stage for a successful Rahmonov-Nuri meeting on 10 December, which proved pivotal in rapidly advancing progress toward a peace accord. By 15 December, fighting had eased throughout eastern Tajikistan, and remained at a low level throughout the final months of the war as the regime and the opposition grew closer to a final power-sharing agreement.

### **3.2.2 Irregular Warfare on the Tajik-Afghan Border**

The Tajik-Afghan border had been the scene of confrontation between Russian Border Troops and Tajik militants and smugglers throughout Phase I of the war, with Russian officials claiming that in 1992 more than a thousand infiltrators had been detained and hundreds of guns seized.<sup>374</sup> (It should be noted, however, that statistics supplied by the Border Troops may have

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<sup>370</sup> UN Security Council Report (September 1996), 5; ICRC News Releases: 28 August 1996, 2 October 1996; AFP, 24/7/96; UPI, 24/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 26/7/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 31/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 1/8/96(a); UPI, 1/8/96; BBC/Interfax, 9/8/96; UPI, 12/8/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 16/8/96; AFP, 17/8/96; AP, 17/8/96; BBC/Tajik Radio, 21/8/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 23/8/96(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/8/96(a); AP, 26/8/96; BBC/Interfax, 26/8/96.

<sup>371</sup> On the events in Karategin in September-October, see: UN Security Council Reports: September 1996, December 1996; AFP, 7/9/96; UPI, 7/9/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/9/96(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/9/96(b); AP, 12/9/96; BBC/Interfax, 13/9/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/9/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 18/9/96; BBC/Interfax, 21/9/96; BBC/Interfax, 27/9/96; AFP, 30/9/96; BBC/Tajik Radio, 2/10/96; AP, 14/10/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/10/96; NPR, 11/12/96.

<sup>372</sup> The text of the Gharm Protocol can be found in Abdullaev and Barnes (2001), 67-68.

<sup>373</sup> On events in eastern Tajikistan from October to December 1996, see: UN Security Council Report (December 1996); ICRC News Releases: October 1996, 4 December 1996; ICRC Operational Update (December 1996); AFP, 25/10/96; AFP, 27/10/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/10/96; AP, 29/10/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 30/10/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 1/11/96; AP, 2/11/96; BBC/Radio Russia, 5/11/96; BBC/Radio Russia, 6/11/96; AFP, 8/11/96; BBC/Radio Russia, 9/11/96; AP, 14/11/96; BBC/Interfax, 16/11/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 16/11/96; BBC/NTV, 19/11/96; BBC/NTV, 21/11/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/11/96; BBC/Interfax, 27/11/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/11/96; AFP, 2/12/96; AP, 2/12/96; UPI, 2/12/96; AP, 3/12/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 3/12/96; AP, 4/12/96; UPI, 4/12/96; AFP, 6/12/96; AP, 7/12/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 9/12/96; BBC/NTV, 11/12/96; AFP, 12/12/96; BBC/RIA, 12/12/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/12/96; AP, 13/12/96; BBC/Interfax, 14/12/96; AFP, 15/12/96; BBC/RIA, 21/12/96; AFP, 28/12/96.

<sup>374</sup> Official Kremlin Broadcast, 20/7/93(a).



been exaggerated – a caveat that should be kept in mind throughout this section.<sup>375</sup>) After Tajik opposition militias were routed and fled to northern Afghanistan in late 1992/early 1993, the border became the frontline between Islamist militias and the state armed forces supporting the Rahmonov regime. These were primarily the Russian Border Troops, backed by the 201<sup>st</sup> division, along with a CIS joint peacekeeping force comprising small numbers of Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Kazakh forces.

Cross-border attacks intensified as the Islamist opposition reconstituted itself in northern Afghanistan in 1993. A typical attack consisted of an artillery barrage against a Russian border post from opposition positions in Afghanistan, followed by an infantry assault with anywhere between 30 and 150 men; the Russians typically repelled such large-scale attacks, however, thanks to helicopter and fighter air support.<sup>376</sup> The aim of these attacks was not simply to kill Russian servicemen or destroy border posts but to facilitate the infiltration of militants across the border into Tajikistan, either to link up with groups operating in Gharm and Tavildara or to establish new strongholds on Tajik territory (or, as time went on, to participate in narco-trafficking and smuggling activities).<sup>377</sup> Attacks occurred along a wide stretch of the border, from the flat riverlands around Pyanj to the mountainous terrain around Shurabad and Kalaikhum. The length of the border (1,400 kilometres) and the terrain posed considerable difficulties for the Border Troops, as noted by its chief of staff Alexander Tymko: 'The border is not protected by border guards who form a human chain. They are defending certain key locations, and these groups have been able to infiltrate'.<sup>378</sup> The situation was rendered even more difficult by the fact that on the Afghan side, there were no government border troops at all, just warlord militias who tended to side with the UTO. There was also the added complication of continuing attempts at refugee repatriation, with tens of thousands of Tajiks still living in camps in northern Afghanistan.<sup>379</sup>

In response to the border attacks, Russian forces began firing artillery into Afghanistan, with its attacks on Kunduz on 18-19 June 1993 representing the first significant Russian military operation in Afghanistan since its humbling withdrawal in 1989. According to the Afghan government, these attacks caused many civilian casualties and set crops on fire.<sup>380</sup> In early July, the Russian Border Troops announced that since January, 300 militants and 9 Russian

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<sup>375</sup> USIP (1995); Atkin (1997a), 621.

<sup>376</sup> Tousley (1995), 28; AFP, 30/5/93; UPI, 2/7/93; AFP, 2/7/93(b); BBC/Interfax, 6/7/93. The Russians were not able, however, to prevent covert infiltration by small groups of militants and smugglers.

<sup>377</sup> *Moscow News*, 26/8/94.

<sup>378</sup> Official Kremlin Broadcast, 20/7/93(a).

<sup>379</sup> AP, 20/7/93(c).

<sup>380</sup> AFP, 22/6/93(a); BBC/Radio Afghanistan, 23/6/93; AFP, 17/7/93(a).

border guards had been killed in border clashes.<sup>381</sup>

On 13 July, the most notorious border clash of the war occurred when several hundred Tajik and Afghan militants attacked the lightly armed Moskovsky border post and the nearby village of Sarigor, killing 25 Russian border guards and 100 Tajik civilians.<sup>382</sup> The attack was seen as a 'national tragedy' within Russia, and caused considerable distress coming only a few years after their previous traumatic engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>383</sup> It is likely that the UTO hoped such a dramatic attack would spur a Russian withdrawal from the country, and indeed many within Russia questioned continued involvement in another Central Asian 'quagmire'.<sup>384</sup> For the most part, however, Russian politicians and military leaders demanded the deployment of additional troops and aircraft as well as bombing missions inside Afghanistan in order to eliminate the UTO guerrillas.<sup>385</sup> The incident was an important test of Russia's new 'near abroad' military doctrine, and a failure to respond would undermine the doctrine's credibility not just in Central Asia but in the Caucasus and Black Sea regions as well. Yeltsin gave Russian military forces 'carte blanche' to retaliate against militant groups in northern Afghanistan; fighter planes, tanks and armoured vehicles were quickly dispatched, along with the first of what would become an additional 10,000 troops.<sup>386</sup> Russian forces initiated a series of artillery bombardments of villages in Takhar province (opposite the destroyed border post), with hundreds of Afghan civilians reported killed and thousands having to flee.<sup>387</sup> Throughout the following month, Russian planes continued to bomb villages in both Takhar and the Afghan Badakhshan province, killing hundreds.<sup>388</sup> At the same time, Russia pushed for political negotiations – both Tajik-Tajik and among the region's states – to resolve the conflict, as it became more and more apparent that a military solution was unlikely.<sup>389</sup>

By December, the number of border attacks for 1993 had risen to 370.<sup>390</sup> These were, however, increasingly staged from the Tajik side of the border as well, as opposition militants

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<sup>381</sup> AFP, 8/7/93.

<sup>382</sup> UPI, 14/7/93. For more accounts of the incident, see: Rubin (1993), 85-86; AFP, 14/7/93(a); AP, 14/7/93; BBC/Mayak, 16/7/93; Official Kremlin Broadcast, 20/7/93(a).

<sup>383</sup> RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16/7/93; AP, 16/7/93; AP, 16/2/94.

<sup>384</sup> RPD/*Izvestia*, 17/7/93. See also: AP, 20/7/93(a); AFP, 21/7/93; AP, 21/7/93; BBC/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22/7/93; RPD/Multiple sources, 22/7/93; BBC/Interfax, 24/7/93; BBC/Ostankino, 17/8/93.

<sup>385</sup> AFP, 14/7/93(b); AFP, 15/7/93(a); RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17/7/93; RPD/*Pravda*, 20/7/93.

<sup>386</sup> Rubin (1993), 85-86; Inter-Press Service, 15/7/93; *The Independent*, 16/7/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/7/93(a); Official Kremlin Broadcast, 20/7/93(a); AFP, 20/7/93(a); *The Independent*, 20/7/93; BBC World Service, 18/8/93; *Washington Post*, 22/8/93; BBC/Kyrgyzkabar, 2/9/93.

<sup>387</sup> AFP, 16/7/93(b); AP, 18/7/93; BBC/Russia TV, 22/7/93; AFP, 22/7/93(b); AFP, 25/7/93; AFP, 26/7/93.

<sup>388</sup> AFP, 30/7/93; BBC/Radio Afghanistan, 3/8/93; Reuters, 4/8/93; AFP, 3/8/93(a); UPI, 11/8/93; AFP, 16/8/93.

<sup>389</sup> Akiner (2001); Kuzmin (2001), 208-09; Reuters, 29/7/93; UPI, 29/7/93; BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2/8/93; *New York Times*, 8/8/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/4/94(a); UPI, 5/4/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 19/9/94(a); RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11/10/94; Official Kremlin International Broadcast, 22/3/95.

<sup>390</sup> See: AFP, 11/10/93; AFP, 25/9/93; AFP, 5/10/93; BBC/Interfax, 16/10/93; BBC/Mayak Radio, 22/10/93; UPI, 26/10/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/11/93; BBC/Russia's Radio, 6/11/93; AP, 11/11/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 13/11/93; AP, 24/11/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 7/12/93; AP, 11/12/93; AP, 24/12/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/1/94.

re-established a presence in southern Tajikistan (partly under the shield of refugee repatriation). By the end of the year, militants were conducting guerrilla attacks on targets further inside southern Tajikistan.<sup>391</sup> In some cases, opposition militants were able to control small border regions for weeks before being repelled by Russian and Tajik forces.<sup>392</sup> In 1994, Russian and Tajik border forces continued to clash frequently with Tajik and Afghan militants: 30 Border Troops were killed and 42 wounded; 321 militant border infiltrations were repelled; and there were 94 serious armed clashes, with border posts coming under fire 237 times.<sup>393</sup> Occasional government counteroffensives proved tactically successful yet strategically insufficient (in that they did not decisively remove the militant threat).<sup>394</sup> Russian commanders estimated at the time that there were around 2,500 – 5,000 opposition militants inside Tajikistan and another 10,000 in northern Afghanistan.<sup>395</sup> Their presumed aim at this time, having maintained and in some areas expanded their presence on Tajik soil, was to hold onto enough territory in the mountainous border region to establish strongholds for prolonged guerrilla warfare in southern Tajikistan, and to bring their ‘government in exile’ (headed by Nuri) back into the republic.<sup>396</sup>

In April 1995, the opposition launched a major offensive, with hundreds of militants engaged in multiple and coordinated attacks on border forces in Badakhshan.<sup>397</sup> Russian commanders believed the opposition’s objectives with the offensive were: 1) to establish strongholds in Badakhshan and use the region as a ‘bridgehead for a subsequent offensive on eastern and then central Tajikistan’, and 2) to either sabotage or gain new leverage for the planned fourth round of peace talks.<sup>398</sup> The Russian Border Troops were able to dampen the offensive after a week, using helicopter gunships to destroy militant positions. Forty-one Russian and Kazakh servicemen and at least two hundred militants were killed during the offensive. The scale and ferocity of the offensive sparked fears that the low-intensity border conflict was on the verge

<sup>391</sup> AP, 25/11/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/12/93.

<sup>392</sup> UPI, 18/12/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/12/93(b).

<sup>393</sup> Official Russian Border Guard statistics, reported in: BBC/Interfax, 20/12/94.

<sup>394</sup> For border incidents in 1994, see: UN Security Council Reports, April 1994 and June 1994; AFP, 17/1/94; UPI, 12/2/94; UPI, 18/2/94; UPI, 20/2/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 24/2/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 23/2/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 10/3/94; BBC, 18/3/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 23/4/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 10/5/94; BBC/Radio Russia, 23/5/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/6/94; BBC/Ostankino, 22/6/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 21/7/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/9/94; AP, 16/9/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/9/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/9/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/9/94; AP, 30/9/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 3/10/94(c); BBC/RIA, 4/10/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 14/10/94; BBC/Ostankino, 20/10/94; BBC/Multiple sources, 1/11/94; BBC/Radio Russia, 3/12/94; AP, 12/12/94.

<sup>395</sup> Ruesch (1994), 3; Kuzmin (2001), 203; BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/4/94.

<sup>396</sup> RPD/*Izvestia*, 26/8/94; RPD/*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25/8/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/8/94(a).

<sup>397</sup> On the April 1995 offensive, see: Auten (1996), 204; Kuzmin (2001), 209; Lynch (2001), 56; US Department of State (1996), 108; UN Security Council Report, May 1995. Also see: AFP, 7/4/95; AFP, 10/4/95; AP, 11/4/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 11/4/95(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 11/4/95(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 11/4/95(c); BBC/Russian Public TV, 12/4/95; BBC/Interfax, 12/4/95(a); BBC/Interfax, 12/4/95(b); *The Guardian*, 12/4/95; *New York Times*, 12/4/95; BBC/Interfax, 13/4/95; AFP, 14/4/95(a); AFP, 14/4/95(b); AP, 14/4/95; *The Guardian*, 14/4/95; *Washington Post*, 14/4/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/4/95.

<sup>398</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 21/2/95(a); BBC/Radio Russia, 12/4/95; *Moscow News*, 21/4/95.

of escalating, but the April offensive proved to be the most intense fighting of the year, as border attacks returned to their previously consistent but containable level.<sup>399</sup> Around 700 militants were killed at the border between January and November 1995.<sup>400</sup>

In September 1996, however, events across the border in the interminable Afghan civil war shook the contours of the border conflict drastically. In a dramatic turn of events, Kabul fell to the Taliban, the Pakistan-aided movement of former religious students and refugees. This development sent shock waves throughout the region, as the reality of a fundamentalist Islamic and Pushtun-controlled state alarmed Russia, Iran and the Central Asian regimes. Yeltsin, Karimov and Rahmonov feared continued Taliban expansion into the former Soviet space, or at the very least a 'contagion effect' amongst their impoverished and dissatisfied populations, as well as a flood of refugees, arms and drugs from Afghanistan.<sup>401</sup> Tajik opposition leaders were also distressed: their Afghan patrons (Massoud and Hekmatyar) were disempowered and chased north toward the Tajik border, and the reinforcements that Russia now considered sending to the border would complicate the UTO's cross-border insurgency.<sup>402</sup> This radical change in the broader strategic environment induced a shared anxiety amongst the warring Tajik factions, and facilitated progress in the fitful negotiation process.<sup>403</sup> The Tajik-Afghan border region continued to be a source of infiltration and general instability, but it gradually ceded its role as a frontline in the Tajik civil war.

### 3.2.3 The Security Challenge Posed by PFT Warlords

The Rahmonov regime had limited control over a number of PFT field commanders who had acquired significant resources, followers and local authority during Phase I of the war.<sup>404</sup> With the official dissolution of the PFT, these commanders took on formal or informal leadership roles within the new security structures but operated with a great deal of autonomy for

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<sup>399</sup> On the border conflict for the rest of 1995, see: UN Security Council Reports: June 1995, September 1995, March 1996; BBC/Itar-Tass, 24/4/95; AFP, 26/4/95; AFP, 29/4/95; AFP, 30/4/95; AFP, 2/5/95; AFP, 6/5/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/5/95; BBC/Interfax, 8/5/95; AFP, 15/5/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 16/5/95; BBC/Tajik Radio, 19/5/95; AP, 30/5/95; AFP, 3/6/95; AFP, 8/6/95; BBC/Interfax, 12/6/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/6/95; AFP, 29/6/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/7/95; UPI, 2/8/95; BBC/Interfax, 7/8/95; BBC/Interfax, 19/8/95; AFP, 21/8/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 25/8/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/9/95(a); AP, 7/9/95; AP, 11/10/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 18/10/95(a); BBC/RIA, 3/11/95(a); AP, 20/11/95; BBC/Interfax, 4/12/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/12/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 13/12/95; BBC/Interfax, 15/12/95; UPI, 22/12/95; AP, 24/12/95.

<sup>400</sup> AFP, 28/11/95.

<sup>401</sup> On the regional reaction to the Taliban triumph, see: AFP, 27/9/96; AFP, 28/9/96(b); Inter-Press Service, 28/9/96; RPD/*Segodnya*, 28/9/96; AP, 30/9/96; Inter-Press Service, 30/9/96; AFP, 1/10/96(c); AP, 1/10/96; *The Times*, 1/10/96; *Moscow News*, 3/10/96; UPI, 4/10/96; AFP, 5/10/96(a); AFP, 5/10/96(b); RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5/10/96; RPD/*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 6/10/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 7/10/96; *Moscow Times*, 10/10/96; Inter-Press Services, 21/10/96; RPD/VEK, 1/11/96; BBC/Radio Afghanistan, 6/11/96.

<sup>402</sup> AFP, 28/9/96(b); AP, 1/10/96(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/10/96; AP, 5/10/96; BBC/Interfax, 14/10/96; *The Times*, 30/10/96.

<sup>403</sup> BBC/Interfax, 30/9/96; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16/10/96.

<sup>404</sup> Chapter 7 discusses the appropriateness of 'warlord' as a descriptive term for field commanders on both sides.

several years. A number of events reveal the challenge posed by these former PFT commanders to the regime's authority and their destabilising influence on local regions.

For example, in 1995, rival army brigades in Kurgan-Tyube engaged in a spate of tit-for-tat attacks as they competed for control over local resources. Both brigades were former PFT units that had been incorporated into the new security forces and posted in Kurgan-Tyube. The First Brigade was led by noted PFT field commander and 'Uzbek protector' Mahmud Khudoberdyev. The Eleventh, also known as the Faizali Brigade, was led by Izatullo Kuganov; it was known for engaging in attacks and criminal violence against civilians during government counteroffensives in eastern Tajikistan.<sup>405</sup> Reports at the time claimed that the two units were fighting for 'spheres of influence over local resources, primarily cotton, wheat and oil products'.<sup>406</sup> On 12 June, Kuganov was assassinated, most likely by members of the First Brigade.<sup>407</sup> Skirmishes between the two army units continued for several months before a 'serious military confrontation' between them erupted in September, killing 40 combatants, a number of civilians and one UN observer.<sup>408</sup> Government mediators and police eventually calmed the situation.

A more serious security challenge arose in January 1996, when the large opposition offensive in Tavildara was compounded by a dual mutiny by Khudoberdyev and another former PFT field commander, Ibodullo Boimatov, who controlled Tursunzade (the extent to which they coordinated their actions was a matter of debate).<sup>409</sup> They each demanded the resignation of specific government officials and an end to official corruption, although undoubtedly less civic-minded aims – such as control over aluminium and cotton resources – played a role in their surprising show of strength.<sup>410</sup> Khudoberdyev's forces advanced within 15 kilometres of Dushanbe before the dual rebellion was halted by political concessions.<sup>411</sup> These events were extremely worrisome for the Rahmonov regime – already coping with the conflict against the Islamic opposition and increasing unrest in Leninabad, it could not afford to be challenged by powerful local warlords as well. Lynch argues that this was a key event pushing Rahmonov to seek improved progress in negotiations with the UTO.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> US Department of State (1995); US Department of State (1996).

<sup>406</sup> Atkin (1997b), 302; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/9/95(b); BBC/Radio Russia, 19/9/95.

<sup>407</sup> US Department of State (1996), 105; AP, 12/6/95.

<sup>408</sup> US Department of State (1996), 105; UN Security Council Report (December 1995), 3; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/7/95(b); BBC/Interfax, 4/9/95; AFP, 17/9/95; AP, 18/9/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 28/9/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 11/10/95.

<sup>409</sup> For details of the Boimatov and Khudoberdyev rebellion, see: Atkin (1997b), 302; Lynch (2001), 57-60; UN Security Council Report, March 1996; AP, 27/1/96; UPI, 30/1/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/2/96; UPI, 1/2/96; AFP, 2/2/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/2/96; *Moscow Times*, 3/2/96; UPI, 5/2/96; RPD/*Segodnya*, 6/2/96; *Moscow Times*, 7/2/96; Inter-Press Service, 8/2/96; UPI, 8/2/96.

<sup>410</sup> Lynch (2001), 59-60; Atkin (1997b), 302.

<sup>411</sup> ICG (2001a), 5; *Middle East Review World of Information* (1997), 1.

<sup>412</sup> Lynch (2001), 59-60.

Finally, events in the western city of Tursunzade in January 1997 revealed the ongoing challenge posed by field commanders even as negotiations with the UTO were rapidly reducing the threat from the opposition.<sup>413</sup> Over the previous year, the city had seen increasing violence amongst competing political-criminal bosses and their militias, owing to its strategic location near the Uzbek border and its hosting of the world's third-largest aluminium smelter – an excellent source of lootable funds and hard currency. In early January, Tursunzade police chief Kadir Abdullaev – also known as a local warlord – allegedly raided the brigade headquarters of Colonel Khudoberdyev in Kurgan-Tyube. At least, this was the justification provided by Khudoberdyev when he led his special-purpose battalion to Tursunzade and drove Abdullaev and his militia out of the city after several days of fighting. Khudoberdyev was ordered to leave the city by President Rahmonov but he resisted for several days, claiming his only purpose was to liberate Tursunzade from criminal elements and restore order. Rahmonov was further humiliated when, several days after Khudoberdyev finally withdrew, a Presidential Guard unit was blocked by Tursunzade civilians (mostly women) from taking up positions around the disputed aluminium smelter. Khudoberdyev was then ordered back to Tursunzade to oversee the establishment of a new status quo amongst the competing field commanders and the disarmament of local militias.

The incident highlighted the powerlessness of the regime in the face of local field commanders and militias, and the ongoing competition amongst sub-state actors for the resources and strategic locales in the republic. As such, it serves as an excellent illustration of the blending of criminal and political motives and use of force during this phase of the conflict. It also raised the temperature at the Tajik-Uzbek border, as Uzbekistan protested the spillover of fighting onto its territory during the January fighting. Finally, the events served as a prominent reminder of the ongoing violence experienced by civilians throughout the country, as local disputes amongst strongmen victimised the population just as keenly as actual war-fighting between the regime and the opposition.

It should be noted, however, that former PFT commanders were not the only source of such instability: the saga of former UTO military commander Rizvon 'Rambo' Sadirov and his brothers, who kidnapped dozens of people – including foreign observers and aid workers –

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<sup>413</sup> On events in Tursunzade in January-February 1997, see: AP, 8/1/97; UPI, 8/1/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 9/1/97(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 9/1/97(b); RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9/1/97; UPI, 9/1/97; AFP, 10/1/97; AP, 10/1/97; BBC/Interfax, 10/1/97(a); BBC/Interfax, 10/1/97(b); BBC/Interfax, 10/1/97(c); BBC/RIA, 10/1/97; AP, 11/1/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 14/1/97; BBC/Russia TV, 14/1/97; BBC/Interfax, 14/1/97(b); BBC/Interfax, 16/1/97; AP, 17/1/97; AP, 18/1/97(a); AP, 18/1/97(b); BBC/Interfax, 18/1/97; BBC/Interfax, 21/1/97(a); BBC/Interfax, 21/1/97(b); BBC/Interfax, 21/1/97(c); BBC/Interfax, 28/1/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 5/2/97; *What the Papers Say/Izvestia*, 5/2/97; BBC/Uzbek TV, 20/2/97.

during 1996-97 before being eliminated, is another example of entrepreneurial conflict actors wreaking havoc in a still-anarchic strategic environment.<sup>414</sup>

In sum, Phase II of the war featured a wide array of combatants and battlegrounds, within an overriding strategic environment of irregular warfare and asymmetric stalemate. Observers sometimes mistake the ultimate futility of this phase of the war for strategic insignificance, but the death and displacement of thousands of militants and civilians indicate the continued severity of the conflict for its participants.

### 3.2.4 The 1997 Peace Accord

Finally, in June 1997, Rahmonov and Nuri signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, officially ending the war and setting the terms for post-war power-sharing and disarmament.<sup>415</sup> The accords established a national reconciliation commission and provided for new parliamentary elections. During the transition period, 30 percent of government ministries would be allocated to the UTO, and UTO forces would be integrated into government armed forces; in practice, this meant that UTO field commanders continued to preside over their longstanding militias, now with the imprimatur of official status.

The agreement did not put an immediate end to the low-grade violence that still wracked the country; as discussed in Chapter 7, it was only after several years of postwar co-optation and consolidation tactics that the country became generally stabilised.<sup>416</sup> Nevertheless, the accord was considered a huge diplomatic and political accomplishment, given the previously obdurate stances of both the Tajik regime and the opposition. (Tadjbakhsh's statement that the 'case of Tajikistan can be considered as one of the most successful of UN peacemaking efforts, a model

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<sup>414</sup> On the Sadirovs, see: US Department of State (1996), 106; ICRC News Releases: 5 February 1997, 4 December 1997. For reportage of their attacks and kidnappings, see: BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/4/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 23/6/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 9/10/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/12/93; *The Guardian*, 7/6/94; UPI, 28/11/96; RPD/*Segodnya*, 29/11/96; *Moscow Times*, 21/12/96; *New York Times*, 22/12/96; AFP, 25/12/96; AFP, 5/2/97; AFP, 6/2/97; AP, 6/2/97; BBC/Interfax, 7/2/97; AFP, 8/2/97; BBC/Interfax, 8/2/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/2/97; RPD/*Segodnya*, 10/2/97; AFP, 11/2/97(a); AFP, 11/2/97(b); AFP, 11/2/97(c); BBC/Interfax, 11/2/97; AP, 12/2/97(a); BBC/Interfax, 12/2/97; AFP, 13/2/97; *Moscow News*, 13/2/97; AFP, 14/2/97(a); AFP, 14/2/97(b); *New York Times*, 14/2/97; BBC/Interfax, 15/2/97(a); BBC/Interfax, 15/2/97(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/2/97; *Moscow Times*, 15/2/97; AP, 16/2/97; AFP, 17/2/97; *Moscow Times*, 18/2/97; *New York Times*, 18/2/97; *Moscow News*, 20/2/97; AFP, 26/2/97; AP, 27/2/97; BBC/RIA, 28/2/97; AFP, 15/3/97; AP 16/3/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 19/3/97; BBC/Interfax, 21/3/97(a); BBC/Interfax, 21/3/97(b); RPD/*Segodnya*, 24/3/97; AFP, 27/3/97(b); BBC/Russia TV, 28/3/97; BBC/Interfax, 28/3/97; AP, 30/3/97; BBC/Itar-Tass, 1/4/97; BBC/Tajik Radio, 2/4/97.

<sup>415</sup> The Tajik peace process is well documented in the literature, and thus not treated in depth here. See: UN Security Council Reports (1994-1996); Abdullaev and Barnes (2001); Iji (2005); Akiner (2001); Lubin, et al. (1999); Matveeva (2009); Splidsboel-Hansen (1999); Lynch (2001); Bushkov (1995).

<sup>416</sup> See, for example, ICRC News Releases: 13 August 1997, 12 November 1998, 1 April 1998; Abdullo (2001), 52.

of conflict resolution and reconciliation', is a typical evaluation of the Tajik peace process.<sup>417</sup> Compromise was enabled partly by exogenous factors (including the mutual threat posed by the Taliban takeover and the consistent pressure applied by Russia, Uzbekistan and the UN) but also by the internal strategic landscape: UTO military successes in the east and repeated warlord rebellions were weakening the regime, whilst both sides had begun to fear that the Tajik state might collapse entirely under the weight of continued conflict and deprivation – an outcome that suited no one.<sup>418</sup>

An additional element of the peace deal may go further to explain UTO acquiescence: the transfer of substantial state economic assets to UTO leaders. Unlike other post-Soviet states, Tajikistan had not yet undergone significant privatisation, and was thus in a position to offer an array of properties and industries as an inducement to peace.<sup>419</sup> For example, Qazi Turajonzoda, in addition to becoming first deputy prime minister, acquired a cotton-processing plant, a shopping centre, and control over wheat imports from Kazakhstan. Other field commanders were not granted property, but were tacitly allowed to continue their narco-trafficking activities.<sup>420</sup> The peace agreement required approval from both sides not just on the distribution of political and military power but on the division of economic assets and activities. This aspect of the negotiations is, however, generally overlooked in Tajik conflict resolution case studies, although the use of targeted economic incentives is an increasingly noted factor in political economy treatments of negotiated conflict settlements.<sup>421</sup>

The Leninabadi, Hissari and Uzbek members of the ruling power structure generally opposed the terms of the accord as they feared that it would be they – and not the Kulyabis – who would be forced to make way for UTO appointments in the new government.<sup>422</sup> When this did in fact come to pass, the wartime coalition became even more fractured, as discussed in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Conclusion: Key War-Fighting Characteristics of the PFT**

This chapter aimed to provide a fuller understanding of the PFT as a conflict actor, in advance of discussing its victimisation activities in particular. Having reviewed the key events of the civil

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<sup>417</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 3; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 2; Iji (2005).

<sup>418</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 3; Lynch (2001), 51.

<sup>419</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 54; Nakaya (2009), 263; Lewis (2008), 168. See also Heathershaw (2011), 35.

<sup>420</sup> De Danieli (2011), 140. In this regard, the Tajik case contradicts the conventional wisdom that narcotics prolong conflict because rebels cannot be granted continued control over illicit activities as part of a negotiated settlement. Cornell (2005a), 755.

<sup>421</sup> Wennmann (2011), 348.

<sup>422</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 123; Lynch (2001), 64.



war and the PFT's role within them, it is possible to answer the questions noted in the Introduction regarding the nature of the PFT (specifically, its origins, membership, aims, strategies, organisation and evolution). These key findings are summarised here.

First, with respect to the origins of the PFT, the group emerged most directly from the National Guard created by President Nabiev in May 1992, led by long-time mafia boss Sangak Safarov and staffed by his criminally-minded comrades from Kulyab. A second branch emerged in Hissar under the leadership of Safarali Kenjaev. More broadly, the origins of the PFT can be said to have rested in the regime's need for a private security force within the context of destabilising political conditions, as well as the historically corrupt connections that allowed it to draw upon 'violence specialists' who could quickly fulfil this function. This initial mobilisation was crucial to the rapid development of the PFT as a conflict actor.

Second, PFT leaders and field commanders were a mix of corrupt political officials (such as Kenjaev) and career criminals (like Safarov and Salimov). They were mostly Kulyabi or Uzbek men, and had held positions of local authority or usefulness (formal or informal) prior to the war. The broader PFT membership was diverse, reflecting the wide variety of motivations for joining the militias (from enthusiastic desire for violence, revenge and looting to unwilling coercion).

Third, with respect to aims, the official *raison d'être* of the PFT was the defence of the secular republic against the Islamist opposition. In truth, 'power and money' were equally likely motivations for Kulyabi and Hissari actors vying with rival blocs in the context of political and economic disintegration. PFT militias fought primarily against Gharmi, Pamiri and sometimes Uzbek militias, in Kulyab, Kurgan-Tyube and Dushanbe. The decentralised nature of the conflict meant that some militias fought mostly for defensive aims – to protect Kulyabi kolkhozy, for example – whilst others fought aggressively to achieve control over territory in Kurgan-Tyube and to seize the capital and other vital targets. PFT militias also engaged in retributive ethnic cleansing in the autumn and winter of 1992.

Fourth, the PFT pursued a strategy of militia-based irregular warfare during much of 1992: small bands of lightly armed men contested other militia, with little regard for civilian casualties, across the rural south. With the acquisition of Russian tanks and additional support from Uzbek sources, the PFT was eventually able to engage in slightly more conventional war-fighting, taking the cities of Kurgan-Tyube and Dushanbe and provoking the flight of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the south. During Phase II, some former PFT commanders pursued

what might be called a 'warlord strategy' of fighting, in that they invested considerable time and resources maintaining their private security forces and loyal constituencies as a means of retaining their personal authority and defying the regime. In general, PFT strategies were dictated by their limited resources and operating conditions as well as the extremely decentralised nature of war-fighting throughout most of the conflict.

Fifth, the PFT was supplied largely via criminal means, with additional support from Uzbek and Russian sources (the exact nature of which was hotly contested). The PFT was loosely organised within Kulyabi and Hissari camps, with militias operating independently much of the time, although a greater degree of coordination and organisation was evident in the later stages of 1992. Local solidarity networks and groups were the primary organisational mechanism for militias. During Phase II, PFT warlords continued to support themselves via criminal enterprises and organised their resources in a manner similar to legitimate solidarity groups.

Finally, with respect to the evolution of the group, the PFT was dissolved in the spring of 1993. Many of its leaders and members joined the new Tajik security forces, whilst some opted to remain outside official structures. In either case, many remained involved in criminal violence and occasional challenges to the regime's authority, as will be detailed in the following chapters.

In short, the PFT possessed a number of war-fighting characteristics that are typical in civil war non-state actors: mobilised and organised according to local solidarity network mechanisms; supplied by criminality and state allies; led by local authority figures; and pursuing asymmetric strategies of warfare, heavily dependent on victimisation and clearly adaptable in the event of weaponry advances. However, the PFT is distinguished by the overwhelmingly criminal character of its leaders and membership, as well as by the fact that its opponents were also non-state militias (and not a strong state security force). All of these features had important implications for the PFT's use of civilian victimisation, as the following chapters will detail.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an expanded strategic history of the Tajik civil war and the PFT and thus enable a more fine-grained analysis of the civilian victimisation that occurred during the conflict. Having now presented the variables that structured the strategic environment, an accounting of the actual events of the war, and an explication of the PFT as a conflict actor, it is possible to turn to the first step in our analytical framework: constructing a meaningful and useful typology of victimisation in Tajikistan and situating the PFT within it.

## CHAPTER 4

### A TYPOLOGY OF CIVILIAN VICTIMISATION IN TAJIKISTAN AND THE ROLE OF THE POPULAR FRONT

This chapter aims to answer the first element of the central research question posited by this dissertation: *how did the Popular Front of Tajikistan victimise civilians?* It commences the interrogation of the Tajik war case study by constructing a typology of civilian victimisation in Tajikistan and situating the PFT within it. It distils from the just-provided strategic narrative a categorisation and aggregation of the countless acts of barbarism embedded in the Tajik conflict, and elucidates a group-level analysis of the PFT role within such behaviour. This chapter represents a wholly original contribution to the study of the Tajik war and civilian victimisation, and sets the stage for the subsequent chapters' exploration of incentives and outcomes. Its main findings are: 1) civilian victimisation in the Tajik war can be primarily and usefully categorised within three broad areas: targeted violence, displacement and crime; 2) the PFT played the most significant role in civilian victimisation during both phases of the conflict, largely due to their victory in Phase I and their incorporation into government and security structures in Phase II; 3) criminal and political violence cannot be easily or meaningfully separated in the case of Tajikistan, but rather were manifested symbiotically throughout the war.

In 1994, Human Rights Watch referred to Tajikistan as, quite simply, a 'human rights disaster area'.<sup>423</sup> Following the brutality of the first year of the war, when massacres and ethnic cleansing were a frequent tactic of non-state armed forces, civilians continued to be victimised by paramilitaries and government forces. Throughout the country, corruption, poverty, displacement and crime meant that many Tajiks lived in conditions of constant insecurity and frequent violence.<sup>424</sup> In Dushanbe, the murder rate skyrocketed and civilians (especially women) shunned the streets after dark in order to avoid gangs of drunken armed men.<sup>425</sup> In rural areas, impoverished residents were forced to 'pay tribute' or otherwise support militias on both sides of the conflict; those who refused risked death.<sup>426</sup> Returning refugees in the countryside were subjected to revenge killings, kidnappings and rape.<sup>427</sup> Criminal groups

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<sup>423</sup> Human Rights Watch (1994b), 1.

<sup>424</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 119; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/1/93; *New York Times*, 21/2/93.

<sup>425</sup> US Department of State (1995), 9; Lynch (2001), 60; Interview (Tajik war survivors), Dushanbe, 2008; Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93; *The Times*, 23/7/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 29/7/93; *Toronto Star*, 16/3/94; NPR, 12/5/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 21/5/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/6/94; *Moscow Times*, 17/2/96.

<sup>426</sup> US Department of State (1993); UN Security Council Report, December 1995; *The Gazette*, 11/2/93; AP, 3/9/93; AFP, 7/10/93; AFP, 15/11/95; AP, 21/5/96.

<sup>427</sup> US Department of State (1995), 7; Human Rights Watch (1994b), 2; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/5/93; *Toronto Star*, 16/3/94; *Christian Science Monitor*, 19/5/94.

fought over the arms and drugs trade, or black market competition, or political patronage. Even international observers fell prey to murder and assault.<sup>428</sup> The extreme brutality of the first year of the war was not matched, but its effects persisted.

To capture this broad range of transgressive behaviour, I have borrowed the concept of 'spheres of civilian suffering' from Slim (2008), which he uses to demonstrate that

*...civilians are not only killed violently in war, but also endure a range of terrible conditions which can kill them slowly or cause long-term suffering of various kinds. I organize this range of suffering into a typology of seven spheres of suffering which include the direct killing and wounding of civilians in violent attacks and sexual violence as well as the main forms of indirect suffering and death that war brings about by forced movement, impoverishment, famine, disease and emotional distress.*<sup>429</sup>

One benefit of this dissertation's inductive, case-study approach is that one may prioritise those categories of action that have actually occurred without having to account for every potential type of action that might have occurred. Thus, rather than import the Slim categorisation wholesale, I have used it to inform the creation of a typology of the most common forms of civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war: targeted violence; displacement; and crime.

Targeted violence includes acts of physical and sexual violence against civilians based on their regional or ethnic origins. It presumes such attacks to be instrumental, in that perpetrators are not attacking their victims randomly but are purposely targeting Gharmis, Pamiris, Kulyabis or Uzbeks. I have sub-divided this category of victimisation, based on the most prevalent types of attacks, to include: massacres during the 'war of the kolkhozy'; attacks on population centres; ethnic cleansing in Dushanbe; and civilian victimisation during government military operations.

Displacement refers to the mass refugee flows created during the conflict as well as attacks upon refugee populations. This was an especially significant form of victimisation in Tajikistan, given that nearly 1 million Tajiks were displaced at some point during the conflict. I address this category within four aspects: the mass refugee flows during the first phase of the war; victimisation during refugee resettlement; the victimisation of refugees in the Afghan camps;

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<sup>428</sup> AP, 5/12/96.

<sup>429</sup> Slim (2007), 5.

and the creation of new refugee flows during government operations in eastern Tajikistan.

Finally, I consider the ways in which the near-anarchic conditions of lawlessness and crime victimised Tajik civilians during the conflict. In particular, I address the impact of the Tajik war economy; the emergence of the narcotics trade; and the predatory effects of organised crime networks and official corruption.

In sum, my typology of civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war can be visualised thusly:

| <b>Table 4.1. Typology of Civilian Victimization During the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997)</b> |                                                         |                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Targeted Violence</b>                                                                    | <b>Displacement</b>                                     | <b>Crime</b>                     |
| Massacres during war of kolkhozy                                                            | Refugee creation during Phase I                         | Victimisation within war economy |
| Attacks on population centres                                                               | Victimisation of resettled refugees                     | Narco-trafficking                |
| Ethnic cleansing in Dushanbe                                                                | Victimisation of refugees in the Afghan camps           | Organised crime and corruption   |
| Victimisation during government operations                                                  | New refugee flows in eastern Tajikistan during Phase II |                                  |

This categorisation proves useful not only for examining what types of victimisation occurred, but for exploring the instrumental and strategic nature of much of the violence. In short, the typology also helps establish what types of victimisation *did not* occur – for example, ethnic slaughter on the scale of genocide, or the establishment of concentration/forced labour camps – and thus facilitates a discussion of how particular material or normative incentives, in combination with the strategic environment, generated particular forms of victimisation (the subject of Chapter 5).

Following the discussion of the typology of victimisation, I consider the role that the PFT played in perpetrating it. It must be remembered that the PFT was not the only actor in the Tajik conflict to victimise civilians; nevertheless, its victory in the war and subsequent embedding in governance structures gave PFT members a level of power and influence that greatly facilitated their ability to target and abuse the population. To aid in differentiating their roles, I separate them into four positional groups and consider the ways in which each group contributed to civilian victimisation.

## 4.1 Targeted Violence

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, much of the violence directed toward civilians during the Tajik civil war was rooted in the desire – whether for strategic or personal reasons – to inflict harm upon a particular group of people. As Gharmis, Kulyabis and Pamiris are all Tajik, this cannot be termed ethnic violence; even the Uzbek communities within Tajikistan are not as differentiated on a practical level as one might think, given high rates of intermarriage and shared language and customs. I thus use the term ‘targeted violence’ to capture the instrumental targeting of particular groups based on their regional or ethnic origin.

### 4.1.1 Massacres During the ‘War of the Kolkhozy’

As described in Chapter 3, the conflict during the summer of 1992 can be fairly characterised as a ‘war of the kolkhozy’ (to use Roy’s term). Self-defence units in Kurgan-Tyube, comprising Gharmi, Kulyabi or Uzbek militiamen, attacked each other within the rural collective farms and villages that made up most of the southern region. There was virtually no separation of military and civilian spheres; people’s homes were the battleground and the population, if unable to flee, was caught in close proximity to the fighting. The kolkhozy were attacked not only to kill civilians – although they were killed in large numbers – but to acquire resources and control over swathes of territory. Often, after dispersing the population and looting their goods, villages were set afire or levelled. For example, Rubin notes that the PFT, during their push into southwestern Tajikistan in November 1992, ‘systematically destroyed and looted Gharmi villages’.<sup>430</sup>

Both sides to the conflict committed horrific atrocities against the civilian population. Roy notes, ‘This was a savage war: massacres, rape, torture, looting and summary executions. The lower Vakhsh valley was the scene of Serb-style ethnic cleansing’.<sup>431</sup> Human Rights Watch observers reported:

*During the course of the fighting, both sides committed atrocities, including murder, disappearances, hostage-taking, and burning and looting of homes. In June and July 1992, thousands of Kulabis and Uzbeks temporarily fled [Kurgan-Tyube], taking refuge in Kulab and Uzbekistan, respectively. Once they had fled, many of their homes were burned and looted. By August, however, the Popular Front and its supporters had gained control of most of*

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<sup>430</sup> Rubin (1993), 81.

<sup>431</sup> Roy (2007), 140.

*the oblast and forced out hundreds of thousands of Gharmis and Pamiris, most of whom were perceived to have supported the opposition. The victorious Kulabis and Uzbeks engaged in widespread looting and burning of the empty villages left behind.*<sup>432</sup>

The US State Department also stated: ‘Both old guard and opposition elements have been responsible for extensive and continuing violations of human rights, including summary executions of captives, disregard for civilian or non-combatant status, hostage-taking, torture, rape, looting and wanton destruction of civilian and state property’<sup>433</sup>

It is not uncommon for particular types of atrocity or mutilation to become iconic acts in specific conflicts (for example, the amputation of limbs in Sierra Leone, mass rape in Bosnia, and ‘corpse messaging’ in the Mexican drug war). Whilst often invoked as evidence of the irrational barbarity of perpetrators, such acts also fulfil an instrumental purpose in spreading fear and terror amongst the population.<sup>434</sup> In the case of Tajikistan, according to some accounts, victims were disembowelled and their stomachs stuffed with manure, with the bodies then left for their families to find.<sup>435</sup> Such atrocities were instrumental in fuelling not only terror but retributive violence, as noted by a Kulabi field commander:

*And you have to understand one more thing – your enemy does not deserve to tread this land. I realised that when I saw my family – mother, wife and three kids – dead. Not only dead – before killing them, Islamists had performed despicable atrocities on them. Now, when an enemy falls to my hands, it is not enough for me to kill him. I want him to die slowly and painfully ...He screams, choking with blood, and I recall the dead bodies of my children with bellies stuffed with manure and pity only one thing – that I can’t extend his suffering for all eternity.*<sup>436</sup>

Atrocities were also committed as provocations. According to Kilavuz, ‘Militias made use of atrocities in order to elicit support. One informant said... “They killed a person from one side and told that the other side did this. For example, they killed a Kulyabi and said that this was

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<sup>432</sup> Human Rights Watch (1996), 4. Note that contemporary reportage indicates the Popular Front did not actually control most of Kurgan-Tyube until September.

<sup>433</sup> US Department of State (1993).

<sup>434</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 28; Keen (2008), 27.

<sup>435</sup> Matveeva (2009), 20.

<sup>436</sup> Quoted in Nourzhanov (2005), 113.

the work of Garmis”... Militia groups increased support for themselves by making people fear others’.<sup>437</sup>

Militias on both sides targeted not just civilians associated with adversary factions, but civilians amongst their own populations who were deemed insufficiently supportive (a common dynamic in civil wars with identity-based constituencies<sup>438</sup>). In some locales young men were forcefully recruited into militias, both pro-government and opposition, and civilians were forced to provide money and other resources to support armed groups.<sup>439</sup> For the most part, civilians were forced to cooperate with any militia that threatened them, and regional affiliation was not enough to spare those who did not ‘cooperate enough’, for example by not providing enough money or refusing to fight.

As noted in the last chapter, it is difficult to say how many Tajiks were killed in massacres and attacks in the rural countryside. The deaths were not tabulated by any agency, and mass graves were still being discovered the following year.<sup>440</sup> However, the devastation caused by this form of civilian victimisation was undeniably massive: it spurred hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, affected nearly every village in Kurgan-Tyube and brought the rural economy to a halt.

Strategically, this type of civilian victimisation was effective in the sense that it allowed self-defence units to acquire resources and territorial control, and enabled small bands of armed men to conduct ‘ethnic cleansing’ operations that led thousands to flee. However, the ‘war of the kolkhozy’ was more or less a stalemate until the PFT acquired better weaponry and funding in the autumn of 1992. Thus, civilian victimisation on its own did not provide enough strategic success to allow either side to prevail in the first months of fighting.

Finally, one other aspect of the ‘war of the kolkhozy’ – the opposition’s blockade of Kulyab – also represents a form of civilian victimisation. The aim of the blockade was to put pressure on Kulyabi forces to submit, and to cut off support for Kulyabi militias operating in Kurgan-Tyube. Kulyab, one of the poorest regions of Tajikistan, had historically depended on areas now controlled or contested by the opposition (Kurgan-Tyube and Gharm) for food; its situation was even more precarious that summer as mudslides had wiped out much of the crops it did

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<sup>437</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 194.

<sup>438</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 78.

<sup>439</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 704; Akbarzadeh (1996), 1112; Akiner (2001), 43.

<sup>440</sup> UPI, 7/2/93; *London Observer*, 11/2/93.



produce.<sup>441</sup> Famine quickly became a very real threat. However, the opposition's blockade strategy had a negative, unintended consequence, in that it provoked even greater hostility from the Kulyabi population whilst also generating narratives of self-defence amongst Kulyabi combatants.<sup>442</sup> As one analyst dramatically observed, 'The people of Kulyab rose up to fight the new regime...The Kulyabis realized that they were fighting for survival and were prepared to stake everything on it'.<sup>443</sup> Thus, the overall effect of the blockade was mixed. It successfully victimised the Kulyabi population, but not enough to force the surrender of Kulyabi militia units; and, it contributed heavily to normative justifications for violence on the part of Kulyabi fighters.

#### 4.1.2 Attacks on Population Centres

Given the highly rural nature of Tajik society, it is not surprising that most of the violence in the first phase of the war took place amongst collective farms and villages. However, there were also several notable attacks on cities and towns that caused many civilian casualties. As noted in Chapter 3, these included the fight for the city of Kurgan-Tyube in September-October 1992:

*There has been pitched fighting with mortars and APCs in the Kurgan-Tyube Oblast centre. The front line between the warring sides is city streets and residential districts. Every hour the number of killed and wounded grows, every housing estate has been turned into a closed fortress where the residents defend their families and homes themselves. The dead are being buried in courtyards and gardens.*<sup>444</sup>

This urban-type warfare culminated in the PFT's use of tanks against the city, which led to their victory. Similar fighting took place in Nurek in November; *Krasnaya Zvezda* reported that the city looked 'like wartime Stalingrad'.<sup>445</sup> Later, in the second phase of the conflict, the city of Tavildara in eastern Tajikistan would be shelled by opposition forces and remain the scene of constant fighting throughout the summer of 1996, leading the entire population of the town to flee.

<sup>441</sup> Zviagelskaya (1997), 5; BBC/*Izvestiya*, 4/6/92.

<sup>442</sup> Akiner (2001), 38; Zviagelskaya (1997), 5-6; Naumkin (2005), 220.

<sup>443</sup> Zviagelskaya (1997), 5-6.

<sup>444</sup> BBC/Mayak Radio, 8/9/92. See also: BBC/Mayak Radio, 5/9/92; BBC/Ostankino TV, 7/9/92.

<sup>445</sup> RPD/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13/11/92; BBC/Itar-Tass, 3/11/92; BBC/Multiple sources, 13/11/92; BBC/Tajik Radio, 18/11/92.

In each case, these cities and towns were viewed as key targets by the conflict actors. Kurgan-Tyube was the seat of government for the whole region; Nurek was the site of an important road and large power station; and Tavildara was the heart of the opposition's territory. The importance of controlling such centres of gravity led conflict actors to disregard the possibility of harm to the civilian population. In each case, such neglect paid off, even if only temporarily (as we have seen, Tavildara changed hands half a dozen times in 1996).

By far the most notable urban assaults, however, were committed in Dushanbe. The Tajik capital experienced a number of serious episodes of violence: the outbreak of war in May 1992; the coup attempt in October; and the final PFT taking of the city in December. Dushanbe was the ultimate centre of gravity during the first phase of the war; the opposition essentially lost the war when they lost the capital.

An unfortunate aspect of intrastate conflict is that civilian population centres often feature as centres of gravity, and the Tajik war was no different. It is possible that thousands of civilians were killed in the fight to control these cities and towns. Strategically, however, the decision to target cities despite their civilian population was an effective one in the end for the PFT. Their use of tanks and artillery against Kurgan-Tyube and Dushanbe in the autumn and winter of 1992 is, in essence, what led to their victory.

#### **4.1.3 Ethnic Cleansing in Dushanbe**

Following the PFT capture of Dushanbe in December 1992, Gharmis and Pamiris in the capital were targeted by paramilitary forces. Human Rights Watch, which sent observers to Dushanbe in early 1993, reported that 'In the first few weeks after the current government came to power, pro-government paramilitary forces came to Dushanbe and committed appalling human rights violations, including summary executions, capturing and beating or torturing presumed supporters of the opposition, and terrorising civilians'.<sup>446</sup> On the floor of the US Senate, Senator Bill Bradley urged his government to exploit its full range of diplomatic tools to end the ethnic cleansing, explaining:

*I have received direct appeals from those who claim that genocide is being perpetrated against the peoples of the Pamir... Davlat Khudonazarov [the former opposition presidential candidate] and his family have received*

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<sup>446</sup> The organisation singled out Popular Front members as the main perpetrators of atrocities. Helsinki Watch/Human Rights Watch (1993), 1; *Christian Science Monitor*, 26/1/93.

*numerous death threats. His vice presidential running mate, Aspidin Sakhbazarov, in fact was killed, as was the head of Tajik television. Reports of people being dragged from their apartments, pulled off buses and planes, or simply seized on the streets and shot have been verified by a number of sources.*<sup>447</sup>

Civilians were openly targeted based on region of birth, which was noted on their ID papers; Pamiris were also easily singled out as their use of a different form of Persian meant they had difficulty pronouncing certain Tajik words.<sup>448</sup> As early as 16 December, reports appeared in the international media of atrocities directed at civilians associated with the opposition (in this case, the execution of twenty Pamiris outside a cinema by uniformed Kulyabi militia); scores were reported killed in the first week after the pro-communist takeover, and several hundred more by the end of the month.<sup>449</sup> It is believed several thousand were killed by the time the campaign eased in February.<sup>450</sup>

Victims were often seized during inspections of public transport by paramilitary forces, or following raids on individual flats and homes.<sup>451</sup> Areas known to house Gharmi and Pamiri communities were specifically targeted: in the outlying neighbourhood of Awul, for example, nearly all the houses were burned down, several dozen residents were shot to death, and its streets were used as a dumping ground for several hundred bodies of those arrested elsewhere.<sup>452</sup> The selective targeting of particular constituencies was made even more obvious by the return to Dushanbe of groups associated with the new regime: mere weeks after the takeover, with the city under curfew and armed gangs roaming the streets, Uzbek refugees nevertheless began returning to Dushanbe because 'it's safe now'.<sup>453</sup> Their presumed loyalty to Rahmonov, Kenjaev and other leading figures indeed gave them a shield of safety that the defeated constituencies did not have.

Officially, the new regime announced that no one would be arrested or detained for political reasons. But as *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported at the time, 'In actual fact, however, what is happening in Dushanbe looks a lot like a reign of terror with which neither the official

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<sup>447</sup> Congressional Record, 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, US Senate, 5/1/93.

<sup>448</sup> Rubin (1993), 81; Wiegmann (2009), 69.

<sup>449</sup> AFP, 16/12/92; AFP, 17/12/92; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18/12/92; AFP, 23/12/92; AFP, 30/12/92. See also Amnesty International (1993), 3.

<sup>450</sup> Rashid (2003), 182; Gorvin (1997), 230.

<sup>451</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), 4-5; AFP, 16/12/92; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18/12/92; *Christian Science Monitor*, 26/1/93.

<sup>452</sup> AP, 28/12/92(b); Human Rights Watch (1993), 8.

<sup>453</sup> AP, 28/12/92(a).

authorities nor the disarmed self-defence units can cope'.<sup>454</sup> President Rahmonov himself said that the regime 'is not in control of the situation and does not know who is doing the arresting and the killing', and that 'armed groups have infiltrated the interior ministry and are terrorising the city'.<sup>455</sup> Yet despite official denials, the politically motivated character of the ongoing civilian victimisation in the capital was clear, as evidenced by the assassination of the head of the opposition faction in parliament, the arrests and murders of opposition journalists, the obvious regional/ethnic dimension in the atrocities perpetrated by pro-government forces, and even seemingly minor developments such as the government decision to no longer sell airline tickets to Pamiris.<sup>456</sup>

Beyond that, it is difficult to discern the exact identities of the perpetrators, other than their general association with pro-government forces (as opposition units in the city had fled or been disarmed) or criminal syndicates allied to figures in the new regime. It may be true that some perpetrators without such ties took advantage of the chaos surrounding the government takeover to engage in civilian victimisation, as Rahmonov and others claimed. This may account for the statements by Salimov and other government sources, on 17 December, that groups 'of unknown origin' from Hissar had been ordered to leave Dushanbe.<sup>457</sup> It is not clear, however, which groups are being referred to here, and by any account civilian victimisation in the city did not abate with their departure. Security in the city was given over to MVD forces and paramilitaries, but the PFT was also openly operating in the city, and the perpetrators of atrocities were presumed at the time to be loyal to various warlords instead of the Ministry of Interior (they were referred to as 'bandits in uniform').<sup>458</sup> Regardless of the individual identity of perpetrators and victims, the general shape and pattern of violence in the city was evident: the victims were overwhelmingly Gharmi or Pamiri, or somehow associated with the Islamo-democrat opposition, and the perpetrators operated with impunity because of their association with political or criminal authorities.<sup>459</sup>

Compared to the previous types of civilian victimisation, this type of ethnic cleansing campaign in Dushanbe had less strategic value. The PFT had already taken Dushanbe and Rahmonov had been installed; the opposition militias had fled the area. Thus, these attacks were likely

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<sup>454</sup> RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18/12/92.

<sup>455</sup> AFP, 23/12/92.

<sup>456</sup> AFP, 1/1/93(a); RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 6/1/93; AFP, 24/12/92; AFP, 20/12/92; UPI, 7/2/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 9/2/93; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 10/2/93.

<sup>457</sup> AFP, 17/12/92.

<sup>458</sup> BBC/Interfax, 19/12/92; AP, 23/12/92; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18/12/92.

<sup>459</sup> Writing in December 1993, Human Rights Watch noted that 'not a single criminal case has been opened against a member of the former Popular Front for atrocities and other crimes committed during the winter of 1992-1993'. Human Rights Watch (1993), 1; US Department of State (1993).

motivated more by criminal and normative aims, such as revenge and the desire for ‘war plunder’.

#### **4.1.4 Civilian Victimization During Government Military Operations**

This category of victimisation refers to civilian suffering due to government counteroffensives and other military operations following the Kulyabi victory – in other words, after official government security forces had been reconstituted in early 1993. It includes both collateral damage incidents and purposeful victimisation by security forces. Whilst the term ‘collateral damage’ generally connotes civilian casualties that are an unintended result of a military operation, I argue that in the Tajik case these can still be considered targeted violence because the military targets were located in areas that were homogeneously affiliated with the opposition (the Karategin Valley and northern Afghanistan).

As described in Chapter 3, the ongoing military confrontation between opposition militants and Tajik and Russian security forces in Phase II of the war led to civilian victimisation as a by-product of kinetic operations in two specific locales: eastern Tajikistan and the Tajik-Afghan border region. Hundreds of Tajik and Afghan civilians were killed from 1993 to 1997 in collateral damage incidents – largely due to indiscriminate bombing, with security forces targeting militant positions in or near villages, although the opposition also launched rockets at border posts that occasionally hit nearby villages instead.<sup>460</sup>

In addition, government security forces – and particularly the paramilitary forces that accompanied them, many of them former PFT units – engaged in purposeful victimisation of the population as they conducted counteroffensives in eastern Tajikistan.<sup>461</sup> As described in a 1995 US Department of State report:

*[T]he August-September [1994] campaign in Tavildara saw many excesses committed by both sides in the abuse of civilian populations and the confiscation of humanitarian aid. Neither government forces nor the opposition have complete control over all elements ostensibly loyal to them. Government forces, most notably the Faisali Brigade [a former PFT militia], swept the countryside in Vanch and upper Garm, according to one witness,*

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<sup>460</sup> US Department of State (1997), 123; UN Security Council Reports: May 1995, June 1995, September 1995, December 1995; BBC, 20/8/94; UPI, 21/2/94; BBC/Radio Afghanistan, 5/1/95; AFP, 15/4/95; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 31/12/95.

<sup>461</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), 7; *The Economist*, 30/1/93; Inter-Press Service, 11/2/93.

*'like an army of occupation', looting, confiscating crops and beating and killing inhabitants allegedly sympathetic to the opposition forces then active in the area.*<sup>462</sup>

Another representative incident was reported by the UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) in 1995:

*[O]n 13 May, a Special Operations Regiment of the Government entered the village of Khakimu, near Komsomolabad (south of Garm), and began shooting at the local population, causing the death of one person and injuring two others, including a child. This followed an attack on a defence post of the Special Operations Regiment in the village of Chorsada, near Khakimu, on the same day, allegedly by members of the opposition. Five members of the Special Operations Regiment were killed in that attack.*<sup>463</sup>

Continued fighting in the Gharm and Tavildara districts also displaced thousands of civilians (as discussed further below) and disrupted the supply of basic provisions and aid to all of eastern Tajikistan, resulting in an internationally recognised humanitarian crisis.<sup>464</sup> Both sides also utilised land mines, and whilst most of these were placed in less-populated areas, such as mountain valleys – thus endangering mostly combatants, a number of whom were killed by mines during the war – civilians were also killed as they strayed into mined areas to collect firewood or herd livestock.<sup>465</sup>

Whilst both sides committed violence against civilians, the government security forces were generally perceived to be the worse offenders. This was a function of two aspects of the conflict: 1) government forces possessed and used heavy weapons and aircraft, often indiscriminately, and included many inexperienced and unsuitable men in their frontline militias; and 2) the immersion of opposition forces in local communities tempered their violence against civilians (although their guerrilla activities indirectly caused civilian suffering, via government retaliation and interrupted aid deliveries). As an ICRC delegate noted, 'The opposition is living in small groups, living among the population. They don't want to alienate the locals, and [so they] treat them well. The government force tends to be young and

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<sup>462</sup> US Department of State (1995), 5.

<sup>463</sup> UN Security Council Report, June 1995.

<sup>464</sup> BBC/Multiple sources, 17/3/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/1/95(a); *Irish Times*, 10/4/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 21/11/96; *Middle East Review World of Information* (1997).

<sup>465</sup> UN Security Council Report (September 1996), 4; ICRC (May 2002), 2-3. See also: BBC, 18/8/93; RPD/*Izvestia*, 8/9/93; AP, 8/4/94; AP, 13/8/94; AP, 16/9/94; BBC/Russia TV, 4/10/96.

inexperienced, untrained boys...'<sup>466</sup> Broadly speaking, this dynamic followed the pattern predicted by insurgency theory: non-state armed forces, reliant upon the civilian population for shelter and support, are less likely to target civilians. However, opposition forces still clearly demonstrated an ability to victimise civilians either directly – for example, killing uncooperative villagers – or indirectly, such as by stealing aid shipments. The fact that the scope of their civilian victimisation was less than that of the government's does not negate the question of why they would target civilians at all, a conundrum that will be analysed in Chapter 5.

In sum, targeted violence afflicted civilians during the civil war in a number of different forms and locales. In some cases it served an effective strategic purpose; at other times, it appeared to be a function of either neglect or more nefarious criminal and personal motivations. This examination of the multiple manifestations of targeted violence should demonstrate, however, that it was essentially instrumental in nature, and not a random 'lashing out' of violence.

## **4.2 Displacement and Refugees**

The victimisation of refugees during this period was multifaceted, owing to the complex arrangement of displaced civilians throughout Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan. Four types of refugee victimisation can be aggregated from countless incidents of violence and neglect: 1) displacement and ethnic cleansing during the most contested phase of the war, in 1992; 2) the targeting of resettled refugees in Tajikistan after the Kulyabi victory; 3) the victimisation of Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan; and 4) the creation of new refugee flows in eastern Tajikistan as a result of ongoing insurgency.

The 200,000 Russians who fled Tajikistan during 1992 should also be considered refugees and civilian victims of the conflict. However, as they were removed from the conflict zone, they are not discussed further here.

### **4.2.1 Displacement and Ethnic Cleansing in 1992**

The displacement of civilians was a key feature of the first phase of the civil war. Massive refugee flows were triggered by fighting: Russians fled Dushanbe with the outbreak of conflict; Uzbeks fled Kurgan-Tyube as they were targeted by both opposition and pro-government

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<sup>466</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 19/12/96.

militias; and Gharmis, Pamiris and Kulyabis fled their homes ahead of the ravages of enemy self-defence units. During 1992, up to 1 million Tajiks were displaced. Many sought refuge in Dushanbe, straining its capacity to function; Uzbeks tended to seek shelter in Leninabad or Uzbekistan, whilst the Russian refugees tended to leave the region altogether. Pamiris often sought to return to Gorno-Badakhshan, but the addition of thousands of refugees to the already impoverished region generated a humanitarian crisis.

Perhaps the most desperately affected, however, were the Gharmi refugees who were driven out of Kurgan-Tyube toward Afghanistan in late 1992. Following the PFT military success in taking the city of Kurgan-Tyube, PFT units swept south through the Kurgan-Tyube region, driving both opposition militia and Gharmi civilians before them. The attacks and deprivation suffered by the refugees at the hands of Kulyabi militia were clearly intentional.<sup>467</sup> The leading Kulyabi field commander in the border region, Akhmazhan Alimov, was quoted as saying: 'Their condition is their problem. When they moved here to live in our region they had nothing. That's how they should leave us, that's how it will be done'.<sup>468</sup> Safarov, while officially denying the PFT was engaged in ethnic cleansing, was quoted as saying 'that Muslim fundamentalists could either disarm or escape into Afghanistan, "because if they stay our people will kill every one of them"'.<sup>469</sup>

With no safe access to Gharm itself, the refugees gathered together in large numbers in the southern districts of Tajikistan, where they received little aid (the Tajik government denied access to southern Tajikistan to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres, both of whom did operate in northern Afghanistan).<sup>470</sup> The chairman of the Lenin kolkhoz in Kumsangir raion claimed that 50,000 refugees had gathered on the farm's territory – twice the usual size of the population – and that 100 children a day were dying of 'cold, hunger and disease', as the refugees were forced to sleep in the open winter air and food and medicines had virtually run out; he also warned that the entire district faced starvation unless food was urgently delivered.<sup>471</sup>

The situation deteriorated even more rapidly after the November offensive against the Shaartuz and Kumsangir raions: tens of thousands of refugees were trapped between warring militias, subjected to atrocities by vengeful Kulyabi fighters, used as cover by fleeing Islamic

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<sup>467</sup> As such, the actions of the PFT were consistent with the mechanisms of 'strategic engineered migration', as elaborated in Greenhill (2008).

<sup>468</sup> Inter-Press Service, 16/12/92(b).

<sup>469</sup> AP, 28/12/92(b); Itar-Tass, 18/1/93.

<sup>470</sup> AFP, 24/12/92.

<sup>471</sup> BBC/Interfax, 15/12/92.



militants, and often so desperate to escape that they braved the river crossing into northern Afghanistan (one of the few places in the world more war-torn and destitute than southern Tajikistan).<sup>472</sup> In mid-December, UNHCR reported that 5,000 people a day were attempting the freezing swim across the border; thus far, 90,000 had crossed, with tens of thousands more waiting behind them.<sup>473</sup> As time went on, rafts and barges were constructed and more frequently used. Afghan mujahidin welcomed refugees and militants on the opposite side of the river, and at times even sent out boats to fish refugees out of the water in 'a kind of Dunkirk' operation.<sup>474</sup> Hundreds drowned, however, including women and children. Michael Semple, then the Oxfam director for Afghanistan helping to provide relief to Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan, identified them as victims of 'ethnic cleansing' by Kulyabi militia, and in late December he stated that children were freezing to death every night in the refugee encampments.<sup>475</sup> With virtually no fuel available on the Afghan plains, refugees were forced to dig underground bunkers to survive the sub-zero temperatures.<sup>476</sup> The chaos at the border was exacerbated by repeated attempts at infiltration into Tajikistan by Afghan militants allied with the opposition; whilst the Russian Border Troops largely stood by and let refugees flow out of Tajikistan, they tried to prevent infiltration in a series of deadly confrontations.<sup>477</sup>

This type of purposeful refugee creation clearly had a strategic purpose: to obtain control over the entire region of Kurgan-Tyube, by removing enemy civilians and the opposition militants who sheltered amongst them. It also allowed the PFT to acquire significant resources, given the many agricultural enterprises in southern Kurgan-Tyube, including those in the southwest corner which had not yet been touched by war. Thus, this particular type of civilian victimisation was strategically successful. With control over the region and the elimination of opposition militias in southern Tajikistan, the Kulyabi victory was assured.

#### **4.2.2 Victimisation of Resettled Refugees**

However, with the winding down of the first phase of the war, it became clear that one of the most important achievements for normalisation and a return to economic productivity was the return of refugees to their regions. Between January and March, tens of thousands of refugees began to return from Dushanbe, Leninabad and northern Afghanistan. There were a number of logistical obstacles to this process, which the regime attempted to overcome by providing

<sup>472</sup> BBC/*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16/12/92; *The Times*, 17/12/92; *New York Times*, 14/1/93; *Washington Post*, 19/1/93.

<sup>473</sup> *The Independent*, 12/12/92; AP, 28/12/92(b); AP, 17/1/93; *Moscow News*, 22/1/93.

<sup>474</sup> *The Guardian*, 18/8/93.

<sup>475</sup> *Toronto Star*, 24/12/92.

<sup>476</sup> *New York Times*, 14/1/93.

<sup>477</sup> UPI, 28/12/92; *Moscow News*, 1/1/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 8/1/93(a); BBC/Multiple sources, 2/2/93.

refugees with funds to travel and reconstruct their homes, but the major impediments were the result of civilian victimisation during the war: namely, fear of retributive violence, and the fact that many villages had been destroyed or resettled, thus leaving refugees with no homes to return to. (It was estimated that 150,000 homes had been destroyed in the southern regions.<sup>478</sup>) A number of confrontations and deaths occurred early in the resettlement process, leading Sangak Safarov to suggest that in some areas refugees would have to resettle elsewhere to avoid violence.<sup>479</sup> A government official said, 'It will take more than a few months to heal the wounds here...It's difficult for people to go back to living next to each other after all the killing'.<sup>480</sup> Reconciliation was made even more unlikely by the fact that the regime continued to place the blame for the entire conflict on the Gharmi and Pamiri opposition, consistently referring to them as 'enemies of the people' (a phrase borrowed from the Stalinist era of purges and repression).<sup>481</sup> This did little to promote a reversal of the process of demonisation of the communities associated with them.

Safarov, despite his apparent tolerance earlier in the conflict for ethnic cleansing, was now motivated to facilitate the return of refugees in Khatlon, in part because he was uneasy about Uzbek dominance in the region as long as Tajik refugees remained displaced, but also in order to reduce the potential pool of militant recruits amongst the enormous refugee population in northern Afghanistan.<sup>482</sup> In late January, he accompanied Salimov to Pyanj in order to help make arrangements for the return of refugees.<sup>483</sup> In February, he met with Afghan Uzbek warlord General Dostum to try to speed up the return of Tajiks from northern Afghanistan (his personal appearance was meant to reassure refugees that government guarantees of their safe return were credible).<sup>484</sup> On 24 March, Safarov visited Kabodiyen raion in Kurgan-Tyube to help defuse tensions generated by the return of refugees: 8,000 people had been ordered to return to Kabodiyen by authorities in Dushanbe, but no food or shelter had been provided for them; at least 15 died from the poor conditions and others were attacked by local residents.<sup>485</sup> It was on the heels of this trip to Kabodiyen that Safarov met with Saidov, however, a meeting that ended in both their deaths.

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<sup>478</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/5/93.

<sup>479</sup> BBC/Interfax, 1/4/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 30/1/93(b).

<sup>480</sup> Inter-Press Service, 11/2/93.

<sup>481</sup> Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93; Itar-Tass, 1/3/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/3/93(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/3/93; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/4/93; Itar-Tass, 2/4/93; BBC, 15/6/93.

<sup>482</sup> Roy (2007), 49; Rubin (1993), 82; Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93.

<sup>483</sup> BBC/Multiple sources, 2/2/93.

<sup>484</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/2/93(a); BBC/Russia TV, 16/2/93; Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/3/93.

<sup>485</sup> Bornet (1997), 221; BBC/Tajik Radio, 1/4/93(a); AP, 24/3/93(b); AP, 24/3/93(a); Reuters, 24/3/93.

Nevertheless, the end of widespread conflict hastened the return of refugees, and by May 1993 some 500,000 refugees had returned to their homes.<sup>486</sup> However, tens of thousands of Gharimi and Pamiri refugees remained displaced and continued to experience purposeful victimisation before, during and after resettlement, which greatly hampered the process.<sup>487</sup> Their vulnerability and the lack of any real constraints on armed groups made them easy prey for victorious Kulyabis – often formally or informally tied to state security forces – who were eager to wreak revenge or steal property and goods. For example:

*On Sunday [28 March 1993] militants from the pro-government Popular Front in Tajikistan did not let some 300 refugees return to their homes in Khatlon region. Witnesses claim that when the militants heard that the refugees were returning to Turkmenistan state farm, once a stronghold of the Islamic Renaissance Party, they started beating up the men and raping the women. Only interference from the authorities stopped the violence.*<sup>488</sup>

News of attacks in the countryside quickly filtered back to Dushanbe and other areas where refugees concentrated (including northern Afghanistan), effectively undermining attempts by the regime to return people to their homes.<sup>489</sup> As one Gharimi refugee stated, in an account typical of the time, ‘Some people have come from the village to tell us that if we do return, we will be killed’.<sup>490</sup> Even when people could be convinced to resettle, the dire economic situation and the lingering physical effects of victimisation became a further obstacle.<sup>491</sup>

*Every few miles along almost any road in Kurgan-Tyube, a traveller passes another village that has been destroyed – street by street, house by house. Only mud-packed walls with thin whitewashed plaster exteriors are still standing. Before they were destroyed, the houses were looted. Everything was stolen – furniture, window frames, electrical sockets... They even carted off the hand pumps at the wells...*<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Tajik and UN estimates, reported in: BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/5/93.

<sup>487</sup> US Department of State (1995), 7; Human Rights Watch (1996), 1, 13-17; Human Rights Watch (1994b), 1; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/5/93; *The Guardian*, 22/10/93; *New York Times*, 26/11/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93; *Toronto Star*, 16/3/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 3/8/95.

<sup>488</sup> BBC/Interfax, 1/4/93.

<sup>489</sup> Human Rights Watch (1996), 12; Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93; *The Guardian*, 22/10/93.

<sup>490</sup> Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93.

<sup>491</sup> UN Security Council Report (June 1994); Human Rights Watch (1996), 12; BBC/Itar-Tass, 6/5/93; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>492</sup> *New York Times*, 26/11/93.

Events in the village of Zarbador, the subject of several contemporary media reports, illustrated well the patterns of ongoing civilian victimisation in southern Tajikistan.<sup>493</sup> Formerly a prosperous Gharimi farming village near Kurgan-Tyube city, most of its 2,500 residents fled toward the Afghan border after it was attacked by Kulyabi militia over the course of two days in the summer of 1992 (the first day, everything of value was looted; the second, residents were shot and buildings torched). In 1993, the villagers began to return – but so did the Kulyabi militias, now transformed into government security forces like the locally based Faizali Brigade. Ostensibly searching for opposition militants, they killed the few men who had returned. In 1994, the village was occupied solely by women and children – 500 young people, many of them orphans, and 50 women to look after them. With frequent visits by militiamen, it was deemed far too dangerous for their male relatives to return, and the villagers struggled to survive with little food and shelter and little capacity to rebuild or plant crops. They received little international aid thanks to corrupt local officials. Victimisation by the security forces was openly indiscriminate: the commander of the Faizali Brigade, Izatullo Kuganov, admitted that they seized returning refugees randomly, because even if they were not opposition members they would eventually confess to knowing others who were.<sup>494</sup> (Kuganov, it may be remembered, was himself killed by members of Khudoberdyev's brigade in 1995.<sup>495</sup>) The village had also acquired a new 'boss', a Kulyabi from a neighbouring village who maintained a sense of calm, if not normality or prosperity.

The continued displacement of Gharmis and Pamiris hampered efforts to ameliorate the dire social and economic effects of the war. Gorno-Badakhshan struggled to cope with tens of thousands of refugees at a time when it already had problems feeding its own native population; the situation was exacerbated by continued fighting in eastern Tajikistan, which blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid.<sup>496</sup> Refugees generally found it difficult to work or provide for themselves, whilst in their former lands crop harvests decreased dramatically.<sup>497</sup> Displaced populations also became a political issue, with the IRP claiming the dislocation of many of its supporters – and thus their inability to vote – made any elections held during this time invalid.<sup>498</sup> Nuri, the head of the IRP, also stated that the existence of the refugee populations legitimised the ongoing insurgency:

<sup>493</sup> *Toronto Star*, 10/4/94; NPR, 12/5/94; *Christian Science Monitor*, 19/5/94.

<sup>494</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 19/5/94.

<sup>495</sup> US Department of State (1996), 105.

<sup>496</sup> BBC/Multiple sources, 17/3/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 15/6/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/1/95(a); *Irish Times*, 10/4/95; *What the Papers Say/Pravda*, 20/6/97.

<sup>497</sup> Ruesch (1994); BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>498</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/8/94(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/10/94; AFP, 7/11/94(a); Inter-Press Service, 8/11/94.

*[Tajik refugees] are part of Tajik society and have every right to live in their country and be fully active, in both financial and spiritual terms. That is why as long as the Dushanbe regime prevents them returning to their country and living a peaceful life in their own homeland, they have the right to continue their struggle, especially the armed struggle.*<sup>499</sup>

In sum, the victimisation of Gharimi and Pamiri refugees during this period was in essence a continuation of the ethnic cleansing campaign they had endured during the first year of the war. Despite official policies meant to encourage refugee resettlement, the reality was that the government did not provide enough resources to aid refugees in resettlement nor sufficient protection to keep them safe as they did so. However, attacks upon returning refugees gradually lessened, with the US State Department and Human Rights Watch noting a reduction in the number of attacks each year from 1994.<sup>500</sup> This reduced the scope of refugee victimisation, but not the ill effects for those who remained unable to return to their homes or who continued to suffer harassment or violence once they did so. In particular, young male Gharimis – the target constituency for the IRP – continued to be singled out for harassment, arrest and beatings, and the overall drop in refugee victimisation during these years may merely reflect the wholesale flight of many young Gharimi men to Afghanistan or Russia.<sup>501</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Refugee Victimisation in Afghanistan**

The victimisation of refugees occurred not only within Tajikistan, during the process of resettlement, but in northern Afghanistan, where tens of thousands of Tajiks were stranded following the intense fighting of 1992 (estimates of their numbers ranged from 60,000 to 90,000, the latter coming from UNHCR).<sup>502</sup> Living conditions within the hastily assembled refugee camps were bleak and unforgiving – and politically volatile. Roughly half of the refugees were under the protection of UNHCR in the Sakhi refugee camp near Mazar-i-Sharif, in Balkh province, which was controlled by the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum. He offered both Uzbek and Gharimi refugees sanctuary but limited their access to militant recruitment and training. These refugees began to be repatriated relatively quickly; they were moved in groups of several hundred people from Mazar to Termez and onward to Khatlon.<sup>503</sup> The other half of the refugee population clustered in three camps – Ameirabad, Bogh-i-

<sup>499</sup> BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 21/2/95. See also: BBC/NTV, 25/7/96; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>500</sup> US Department of State (1995), 3; US Department of State (1996), 109.

<sup>501</sup> Human Rights Watch (1996), 14; Abdullaev and Freizer (2003), 24.

<sup>502</sup> Rubin (1993), 83; BBC, 21/4/93. For reports on the repatriation process, see: BBC, 26/5/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/7/93; BBC/Interfax, 5/8/93(b); BBC/RIA, 10/9/93; BBC/RIA, 3/8/95.

<sup>503</sup> BBC, 26/5/93; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

Sherkat, and Sherkat – in neighbouring Kunduz and Takhar provinces, at the mercy of local Afghan warlords (notably, Hekmatyar and Chughai in Kunduz, and Massoud in Takhar). In these locales, they received aid from Arab and Iranian sources and were recruited for militant training by the IRP.<sup>504</sup> These refugees were repatriated at a much slower rate than those in the UNHCR camps: by August 1994, only about 5,000 refugees were left in the UNHCR camps but ‘tens of thousands’ remained in other parts of northern Afghanistan.<sup>505</sup> Some were reportedly subjected to cross-border shelling, both from Russian border forces targeting IRP positions and from militants firing upon Russian border posts.<sup>506</sup>

The fear of what awaited them in their home communities kept many refugees from returning, despite the conditions they endured. A journalist who visited the Sakhi refugee camp near Mazar in late 1996 found that while the camp population had dropped significantly – from 40,000 at its peak to 7,300 – most of the remaining refugees had no intention of returning to Tajikistan and were attempting to root themselves in their new surroundings. They were deterred by both the fear of victimisation and the lack of viable livelihoods in their destroyed home villages.<sup>507</sup>

Compared to Tajikistan’s internal refugees, the Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan faced an additional source of victimisation: their usefulness to the opposition’s insurgency campaign. The refugee camps were a primary source of recruits for the IRP, who also received funds under the cover of aid sent to the refugees by Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>508</sup> In addition, the trickle of repatriating refugees provided a means of cross-border infiltration for militants, and IRP leaders used the existence of large numbers of refugees to discredit elections and score political points during peace negotiations. All this meant that the opposition had little incentive to encourage the departure of Tajik refugees, and evidence suggests they actively discouraged repatriation by blocking access to international aid agencies, spreading tales of refugee victimisation in Tajikistan, and even threatening refugees who desired to return.<sup>509</sup> There were also reports of Tajik militants victimising Afghan civilians who objected to their

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<sup>504</sup> On the Afghan political context and support to Tajik refugees, see: Rubin (1993), 83; Tousley (1995), 35; Matveeva (2009), 24; Human Rights Watch (1996); Inter-Press Service, 24/2/93; *The Guardian*, 20/8/93; BBC/APN, 12/3/94; BBC/NTV, 25/7/96; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>505</sup> Burkhalter testimony (1994).

<sup>506</sup> AFP, 22/6/93(a); UPI, 7/4/94.

<sup>507</sup> *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>508</sup> Rubin (1993), 84-85; Tousley (1995), 38; Human Rights Watch (1996), 6; *Moscow News*, 13/8/93(d); *The Independent*, 16/8/93; *The Guardian*, 20/8/93; *The Guardian*, 13/11/93; BBC/NTV, 25/7/96; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96.

<sup>509</sup> US Department of State (1995), 7; Human Rights Watch (1996), 1-12; Matveeva (2009), 24; BBC, 26/5/93; AFP, 7/8/93(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 14/6/94; *Moscow Times*, 11/11/96; BBC/Interfax, 9/12/96.

continued presence, which had brought not only airstrikes but trafficking routes to northern Afghan villages.<sup>510</sup>

This utilisation of refugee populations by insurgents was not unprecedented. In the 1920s, the *basmachis* rebels exploited refugee populations in virtually the same locations.<sup>511</sup> More recently, a similar dynamic occurred during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, when the Afghan mujahidin took advantage of an even larger cohort of refugees in Pakistan.<sup>512</sup> Goodson used this case study to propose a 'refugee-based insurgency model', under which insurgents exploit the protections afforded to refugees under international humanitarian law to obtain funding, recruits and sanctuary.<sup>513</sup> Tousley has noted the model's applicability for the Tajik case as well, with the significant difference that the Tajik refugees were not as numerous or well-funded as the Afghans.<sup>514</sup> Nevertheless, the Tajik case study provides additional weight for Goodson's conclusion that refugee-based insurgencies prolong and internationalise conflicts, as it is doubtful that the Tajik opposition could have maintained its insurgency for as long as it did without the funds, manpower and physical cover that the refugee population provided. In short, the Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan clearly demonstrate that the effects of civilian victimisation can be found in the strategic as well as humanitarian, economic and political arenas.

#### 4.2.4 Creation of New Refugees in Eastern Tajikistan

Finally, refugee victimisation during this period also includes the creation of new refugee populations, primarily as a result of armed clashes in eastern Tajikistan. As early as March 1993, government counteroffensives in the Karategin Valley were generating thousands of new refugees, as people fled further east with the arrival of government security forces and helicopters.<sup>515</sup> The spike in armed clashes in Tavildara in August 1994 caused hundreds of civilians to flee from the area.<sup>516</sup> But by far the biggest influx of new refugees came in 1996, during the fierce fighting that continued throughout the year between militants and government security forces in the Tavildara and Gharm districts. According to the ICRC and other agencies, the fighting generated 15,000 to 25,000 IDPs, who fled either further up the

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<sup>510</sup> BBC/Khovar, 2/9/96; *Moscow Times*, 1/10/96.

<sup>511</sup> Akiner (2001), 22.

<sup>512</sup> Other examples include the Rwandan Hutu insurgents and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. See Polman (2010), Chapter 6.

<sup>513</sup> Goodson (1990), iii.

<sup>514</sup> Tousley (1995), 37. See also *The Independent*, 16/8/93, which notes that the Afghan mujahedin had 3 million refugees to draw upon, compared to 50,000 for the Tajik opposition.

<sup>515</sup> BBC/Multiple sources, 17/3/93.

<sup>516</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 31/8/94.

mountain valleys or west to Dushanbe.<sup>517</sup> It also led to 600,000 people needing emergency food assistance.<sup>518</sup> As reported at the end of 1996:

*The ICRC regularly assists over 23,000 people displaced by the hostilities in central Tajikistan. Since May, the institution had been trying to reach the population cut off behind opposition lines in the Tavildara area. Some 5,000 people are reportedly still living there, in urgent need of protection and assistance...The latest military developments have now also severed access to the population of the Garm Valley, estimated at around 270,000 and including hundreds of families who have been displaced by hostilities in Tavildara. Living conditions in this mountainous region are extremely precarious in winter, and children in particular are at the risk of malnourishment. Vulnerable groups are in desperate need of food and shelter... Because of the rugged terrain and harsh weather conditions, it is extremely difficult for outside aid to reach the victims of this conflict. In addition, for the time being, the road from Dushanbe to Garm has been cut off by the new front line, and the valley is now a no-go area for most humanitarian organizations.*<sup>519</sup>

The following March, with the Dushanbe-Gharm road still cut off, the ICRC reported that its humanitarian convoys to the region were having to 'make a detour of about 1,600 km via Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, across rough roads and high mountain passes, in order to reach Garm from the east'.<sup>520</sup> Even after years of conflict, the humanitarian infrastructure for assisting refugees and IDPs was incredibly fragile and civilian suffering was all too easily provoked.

In sum, civilian victimisation in the form of displacement and the abuse of refugees was one of the most pervasive and challenging forms of civilian suffering during the war. It affected a huge number of people, in a country lacking the resources and sometimes the political will to address the situation. One of the key challenges in trying to counter this category of behaviour was the fact that it was often so strategically useful, helping conflict actors acquire territorial

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<sup>517</sup> UN Security Council Report (September 1996), 7; ICRC News Releases: June 1996, September 1996, October 1996; ICRC Operational Update (December 1996); BBC/Itar-Tass, 30/6/96; UPI, 2/7/96; BBC/Interfax, 16/8/96; BBC/Russia TV, 4/10/96.

<sup>518</sup> UN Security Council Report (1996), 7.

<sup>519</sup> ICRC Operational Update (December 1996).

<sup>520</sup> ICRC Operational Update (March 1997).



control, resources, recruits, funding and revenge fulfilment. It was only when strong incentives appeared to counter this utility that progress was made in easing the plight of Tajik refugees.

### 4.3 Crime

The literature on civilian victimisation in warfare does not generally focus on crime as a mechanism for victimisation in its own right; rather, it is seen as part of the context of an overall atmosphere of lawlessness that facilitates the targeting of civilian populations. In the case of Tajikistan, however, it is clear that the activities of criminal actors were a leading source of violence directed at civilians. For this reason, I argue that criminality should be considered along with 'political' violence in discussions of civilian victimisation.

Before independence, Tajikistan actually enjoyed the lowest crime rate in the Soviet Union and was considered extremely safe.<sup>521</sup> Along with its Central Asian neighbours, however, Tajikistan was beset by a cluster of problems that led to a phenomenal increase in criminality after independence (according to the CIS Statistical Service, crime rose 37 per cent in Tajikistan from 1991 to 1992).<sup>522</sup> According to Mark Galeotti, the most salient factors in the rise of Central Asian crime were: 1) the unprecedented expansion of the drugs trade and associated protection markets; 2) entrenched systems of corruption inherited from the Soviet era; 3) strong clan and regional systems of governance undermining the central government and rule of law; 4) economic deprivation and crisis; and 5) deeply embedded organised crime networks.<sup>523</sup>

In addition to these region-wide challenges, Tajikistan also had the unique problems associated with a brutal civil war and its devastating impact on state and society. As a result of both the civil war and widespread criminality, Tajikistan commonly came to be seen as one of the more dangerous spots in the world. Dushanbe was a haunted capital, deserted after dark except for roving bands of criminals and militia: a 'balmy-aired playground for demobbed fighters who, drunk on vodka, celebrate by firing shots into the skies'.<sup>524</sup> Robbery, extortion and kidnapping for ransom were common tools of predation for armed groups, many of which operated with virtual impunity.<sup>525</sup> Competition and conflict over illicit sources of money and

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<sup>521</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 59; *Moscow Times*, 17/2/96.

<sup>522</sup> RPD/*Megapolis Express*, 24/5/93.

<sup>523</sup> Galeotti (1995), 68. See also: Marat (2006); Engvall (2006); Sterling (1994).

<sup>524</sup> Lynch (2001), 60; *The Observer*, 22/8/93; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/1/93; *Xinhua*, 9/2/93; *Moscow Times*, 13/2/96.

<sup>525</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 34; Human Rights Watch (1996); Human Rights Watch (1994b); BBC/Tajik Radio, 25/2/97; *Asia Times*, 24/6/97.

power led to violence in which civilians were caught in the crossfire, as in 1995 when rival army brigades competing over control of the local cotton industry in Kurgan-Tyube engaged in armed clashes in which a number of civilians were killed, or the numerous small-scale clashes between mafia groups in Tursunzade and Hissar.<sup>526</sup> Criminality was also a key feature of ethnic cleansing campaigns (such as when Pamiri neighbourhoods were targeted for looting in Dushanbe in early 1993) as well as ongoing refugee victimisation (such as extortion and theft directed at Gharmis at roadblocks in Khatlon).<sup>527</sup> Even those who profited from criminality and corruption themselves – Tajikistan’s wealthy new class of ‘businessmen’ – became targets of criminality, particularly kidnapping and extortion.<sup>528</sup>

This section considers criminality within three broad headings: victimisation within the Tajik war economy; narco-trafficking; and organised crime and corruption. Together, these three categories of criminality were responsible for a devastating level of violence and predation against Tajik civilians. The section concludes with a brief consideration of the interaction between ‘criminal’ and ‘political’ violence in war-era Tajikistan.

#### **4.3.1 Victimisation within the Tajik War Economy**

The emergence of a Tajik *war economy* had an enormous impact on civilians. As defined by Ballentine and Nitzschke, war economies ‘involve the destruction or circumvention of the formal economy and the growth of informal and black markets, effectively blurring the lines between the formal, informal and criminal sectors and activities’.<sup>529</sup> Whilst in many ways the Tajik war economy offered coping mechanisms for survival (for example, with the expansion of the black market in food products), overall the removal or diminution of legitimate authorities in the socioeconomic sphere allowed newly powerful armed groups and warlords to victimise civilians by controlling their access to necessities and forcing them to partake in illicit economic activities.<sup>530</sup>

Using Keen’s approach to war economies – i.e., observing the way in which conflict transforms rather than destroys political and economic life within a state – it is clear that the collapse of

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<sup>526</sup> US Department of State (1997), 124; UN Security Council Report (September 1996), 4; BBC/Interfax, 13/8/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 3/1/97.

<sup>527</sup> Human Rights Watch (1996), 14; BBC/Ostankino Channel 1 TV, 8/1/93; Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 12/1/93; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/1/93.

<sup>528</sup> US Department of State (1997), 124; BBC/Itar-Tass, 21/5/94; AFP, 22/7/95; *Moscow Times*, 17/2/96.

<sup>529</sup> Ballentine and Nitzsche (2005), 2. There is no comprehensive work on the Tajik war economy, but some aspects of it are well analysed in: Nakaya (2009); Kilavuz (2007, 2009b); Nourzhanov (2005); Paoli (2007); Ruesch (1994).

<sup>530</sup> See Goodhand (2004) for a useful discussion of the ‘coping economy’ versus the ‘combat’ and ‘shadow’ economies typical of conflict states.

Soviet-era systems and institutions, and their replacement with informal and criminalised mechanisms of governance during the civil war era, created numerous vectors for the victimisation of civilians at the hands of non-state actors and corrupt regime officials.<sup>531</sup> As in other conflicts, the Tajik war economy did not centre around productive economic activity – a difficult proposition given the extent of the war’s destruction and disruption – but rather depended upon the illegal expropriation of resources from enterprises and individuals; extortion and the illegal taxation of goods, services and movement; the theft and diversion of international aid; dramatically rising profits from the narcotics trade; and other criminal markets, such as kidnapping and protection rackets. All of these activities victimised civilians, either directly or indirectly; and the absence of non-corrupt security structures meant that civilians – especially those on the losing side of the conflict – were left with virtually no protection from criminal violence and predation.

The inability of the regime to rebuild much of the legitimate sphere of the national economy – 60 per cent of which was destroyed in 1992-1993 – meant that economic inputs continued to be diverted into these flourishing illicit sectors and markets.<sup>532</sup> According to one model, the Tajik shadow economy was worth 100 per cent – i.e., the same amount – as the official economy.<sup>533</sup> As in many other locales, the Tajik war economy endured because whilst not beneficial to most civilians or the state as a whole, it generated substantial profits for corrupt regime officials and local strongmen. The revenues that once flowed in predictable patterns to regional elites, particularly the Leninabadis, were displaced by new funding flows that predominantly benefited Kulyabi government and security officials, local militias and mafias, and opposition militants. These beneficiaries sought to maintain this new system regardless of its deleterious impact on the Tajik state and population.

At the same time, many civilians lived off the war economy, even if unwillingly, due to economic deprivation, high unemployment and high inflation (at times hitting 500 per cent).<sup>534</sup> According to Ruesch, ‘A minimum monthly wage can now barely purchase one liter of gasoline and a daily loaf of bread. In order to survive, the entire population is obliged to earn extra income from street peddling and other marginally legitimate activities’.<sup>535</sup> In Gorno-Badakhshan, near-starvation conditions encouraged participation in the burgeoning narco-trafficking sector, to the extent that its economy became ‘entirely dependent upon this

<sup>531</sup> See Keen (2008), 15.

<sup>532</sup> Ruesch (1994); Matveeva (2009), 27; Marat (2006), 96; Paoli, et al. (2007), 953; BBC/Ostankino, 11/9/93; RPD/*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 17/7/93.

<sup>533</sup> Williams (2003), 89-90.

<sup>534</sup> AFP, 27/3/96. For summaries of economic deprivation affecting civilians, see UN Security Council Reports, April 1994, June 1994.

<sup>535</sup> Ruesch (1994), 1.

trade'.<sup>536</sup> In 1993, one successful cross-border drugs smuggling trip would net a Badakhshani the same amount of money that the average worker would earn in an entire year.<sup>537</sup> As noted by a Tajik deputy interior minister, '[The] drug trade is the most profitable business in Central Asia and people will never give it up...Opium production is the sole source of income for many of these impoverished people'.<sup>538</sup> Jackson sums up the sometimes positive aspects of organised crime in the region by saying:

*...corruption and trafficking are 'security dichotomies'. Seemingly paradoxical, they can actually be positive for human society because they allow people to survive in poor economies when the state cannot adequately help them. In this sense, clandestine transnational activities may, particularly in the short term, actually be positive or even necessary for both individuals and even for state survival.*<sup>539</sup>

Indeed, the positive aspects of criminality in Tajikistan – and many other conflict states – have contributed to new debates on the normative interpretations of crime and of war economies generally, with scholars and analysts increasingly observing that within the context of conflict and deprivation it is difficult to assign inherent negativity to all criminal behaviour.<sup>540</sup>

Nevertheless, the emergence of an informal and highly criminalised war economy during the civil war era led to numerous manifestations of victimisation amongst the civilian population. The enormous disruption that the conflict posed to the economic functioning of society led inevitably to new informal mechanisms that privileged newly strong actors – i.e., those with the military and monetary backing to enforce their will within the near-anarchic conditions of the Tajik conflict. Paramilitaries and corrupt officials constructed new economic and political systems to suit their needs, not those of the Tajik population, with the predictable result that civilians suffered high levels of deprivation, predation and violence.

#### **4.3.2 Narco-trafficking**

One of the most visible and significant forms of criminality at this time was the drugs trade. Tajikistan traditionally featured several areas of drugs production (such as the poppy fields

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<sup>536</sup> Galeotti (1995), 69; *Irish Times*, 10/4/95.

<sup>537</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93(a).

<sup>538</sup> AFP, 22/6/93(b). See also: *The Observer*, 92/97.

<sup>539</sup> Jackson (2005), 48.

<sup>540</sup> On the normative aspects of criminality in conflict, see: Williams (2003), 93; Lubin, et al. (1999), 71; De Danieli (2011), 131; Wiegmann (2009), 16; Cockayne (2010), 201; McMullin (2009), 94; Wennmann (2011), 350.

around Penjikent in Leninabad) but up until 1992 the country's drug problem was limited to a relatively small amount of local trade and consumption. By 1993, however, Tajikistan had become a key transit state for the burgeoning trade in Afghan opium (and its processed form, heroin) which was now controlled by well-armed, organised and powerful mafia groups within Tajikistan.<sup>541</sup> A number of factors contributed to the expansion of this trade in the region, including the breakdown of borders with the collapse of the USSR; increased migration and more globalised transport; increased production in Afghanistan, which in 1994 became the world's leading supplier of opium for the first time (concomitantly with decreasing opium production in Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle region); attempts to improve counternarcotics in Iran and Pakistan, which increased the attractiveness of the northern routes; increased demand in Russia and Europe; and conflict and economic collapse in the origin and transit countries.<sup>542</sup> As a UN Drug Control Program officer put it, 'There are no incentives to stop the traffic, only incentives to start'.<sup>543</sup>

These factors led criminal networks to establish new trafficking routes through Central Asia, to supplement A) the traditional 'Balkan route' that brought Afghan drugs through Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, the Yugoslav republics, Austria and Germany, and B) the substantial trade through Pakistan, which continued into Iran via Balochistan or exited the country via seaports like Karachi. Now, opiates were smuggled across the Tajik-Afghan border – mostly through Gorno-Badakhshan, where the border was barely guarded – and moved toward Osh through either the Pamirs or the Ferghana Valley; another route moved drugs westward into Uzbekistan. (The Osh route reached Europe via Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltics, whilst the Uzbek route traversed Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and Turkey. Afghan drugs were also smuggled directly into Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.) A few years later, opiates began to be increasingly smuggled via less geographically arduous crossings into Khatlon, and in larger amounts along open highways (thanks to corrupt officials).<sup>544</sup> All along the various routes, the trade was facilitated by connections between ethnic, tribal or clan groups straddling the official borders.<sup>545</sup> However, while voluminous, the flow of drugs along the Central Asian routes failed to permanently overtake those traversing Pakistan and Iran, and currently the European market is primarily served by the Balkan route while the Central Asian

<sup>541</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007); AFP, 9/10/93.

<sup>542</sup> Marat (2006), 96; Paoli, et al. (2007), 952-959; Engvall (2006), 828; Cornell (2005b), 629; Sterling (1994); Lewis (2008), 177; Inter-Press Service, 27/5/94; Inter-Press Service, 11/8/94; *Moscow News*, 4/11/94; AFP, 18/2/95; *New York Times*, 2/5/95.

<sup>543</sup> *New York Times*, 2/5/95.

<sup>544</sup> On the evolving trafficking routes, see: Paoli, et al. (2007), 960; Cornell (2005b), 629; Jackson (2005), 40; Madi (2004), 259-62; Lewis (2008), 177; Lubin, et al. (1999), 70-71; BBC/Interfax, 16/6/93; *Moscow News*, 17/9/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93(a); Inter-Press Service, 27/5/94; Inter-Press Service, 11/8/94; *Moscow News*, 4/11/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/1/95(b); AFP, 18/2/95.

<sup>545</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 953; Inter-Press Service, 27/5/94.

traffic mostly services the now much-larger population of Russian addicts.<sup>546</sup>

The drugs trade was immensely profitable in an otherwise impoverished region. Just a few hours' work ferrying drugs through a mountain pass could earn a Kyrgyz man \$70, or twice the average monthly salary (and much more than the \$45/month paid to border officials).<sup>547</sup> Each step of the trafficking route generated higher profits, so that opium obtained in exchange for food, alcohol or tools in northern Afghanistan could command \$3,000/kilo by the time it reached Bishkek, and \$6,000/kilo in Almaty, just a three-hour drive away (1995 prices).<sup>548</sup> As long as the right people were bribed, there was little risk of seizure. Borders were sparingly manned in many places and counternarcotics agencies generally targeted smaller dealers, sparing the wealthy and well-connected criminal networks.<sup>549</sup>

These sorts of profits help explain the volume of opiates flowing across the border. The Russian Border Troops reported their first seizures of raw opium at the border in 1992, with a grand total of 17 kilograms. This jumped to more than 250 kilograms in 1993 and 1994, and leaped to 1,720 kilograms in 1995 and 1,905 in 1996 (close to two tonnes).<sup>550</sup> These estimates, however, should be assumed to be mere fractions of the actual amount of drugs that slipped through. From 1995, with the increased processing of opium within Afghanistan, heroin began to be trafficked as well.<sup>551</sup>

The absence of sufficient and effective counternarcotics activity – due to a lack of resources, official corruption, cross-border challenges, and especially the connivance of police and security forces with narco-traffickers – helped the illicit drugs trade flourish.<sup>552</sup> The drugs trade was also particularly attractive within Tajikistan due to economic deprivation and the lack of alternative livelihoods (and, at the elite level, due to the considerable wealth, autonomy and power that accompanied higher-level participation in the trade).<sup>553</sup> In the early 1990s, as described by Wiegmann, 'The situation... has been described for both regions [Kulyab and GBAO] as a bonanza for everybody willing to take up the opportunity. Everyone who wanted to could become engaged with drug trafficking. The drug trafficking business was unorganized,

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<sup>546</sup> Interview (UNODC), Bishkek, 2008; Paoli, et al. (2007), 962; Jackson (2005), 41.

<sup>547</sup> *New York Times*, 2/5/95.

<sup>548</sup> *Toronto Star*, 15/1/95; *New York Times*, 2/5/95.

<sup>549</sup> Lewis (2008), 178; ICG (2001a), 19.

<sup>550</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 959-60; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93(a); *Moscow Times*, 17/9/96; BBC/NTV, 28/11/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/12/96.

<sup>551</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 960.

<sup>552</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 955-57; Marat (2006), 109-10; Williams (2003), 85; Jackson (2005), 47; AFP, 22/6/93(b); BBC/Interfax, 11/8/93; *Moscow News*, 10/9/93.

<sup>553</sup> Galeotti (1995), 68; Marat (2006), 96; UNODC (2007), 15; Williams (2003), 84; Paoli, et al. (2007); AFP, 9/10/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93(a).

spontaneous and unregulated. It was driven by a large number of petty traffickers'.<sup>554</sup> An IWPR report on the situation in those early days confirmed this description:

*Afghan traffickers were soon on the lookout for locals poor enough to consider doing the legwork of getting drugs from the border to the interior of the country. 'At first they were polite and didn't insult anyone, but they were persistent in looking for middlemen to dispose of the drugs', recalled one local resident who gave his first name as Alikhon. 'Many people agreed to it since there were no other jobs to be had in those days'.*<sup>555</sup>

Over time, however, the business would become more organised and consolidated, as discussed in Chapter 7.

The illicit drugs industry victimised civilians in several ways. First, it enriched and empowered actors who perpetuated the lawless and deprived conditions under which many were forced to live. As long as corrupt officials and non-government actors were able to maintain their status and control via illicit activity, civilians would continue to suffer from criminal violence, the absence of the rule of law, and economic deprivation. Second, it sustained and dispersed armed conflict in Tajikistan, in which civilians were caught in the crossfire. It funded opposition militant groups, allowing them to continue their cross-border insurgency, as well as local mafias who at times clashed with each other or with security forces. The development of trafficking routes in remote regions also spread the ill effects of the drugs trade through rural communities, in the form of both addiction and higher levels of crime and attacks on civilians.<sup>556</sup> Third, the expansion of the drugs trade required additional manpower, particularly for smuggling activities at the beginning of the supply chain. Whilst many Tajiks participated in the drugs trade willingly, many were also coerced – either directly, through the threat of violence to themselves or the kidnapping of family members, or indirectly, by economic deprivation.<sup>557</sup> If arrested, prison sentences were substantial, and during the 1990s many Tajiks smuggled opiates by swallowing them, which was medically dangerous.<sup>558</sup> Finally, the drugs trade gradually increased addiction rates in the country.<sup>559</sup> Between 1994 and 2003, the number of registered drug addicts in Tajikistan increased tenfold (from 653 to 6,799); the

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<sup>554</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 112. See also Paoli, et al. (2007).

<sup>555</sup> IWPR (22/4/09).

<sup>556</sup> UPI, 24/1/94; *Toronto Star*, 15/1/95.

<sup>557</sup> Williams (2003), 85; *Moscow News*, 10/9/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 4/12/93(a).

<sup>558</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 962.

<sup>559</sup> Williams (2003), 87; Akiner (2009), 368; Abdullaev and Freizer (2003), 16; Lewis (2008), 179; ICG (2003), 21; Inter-Press Service, 27/5/94.

country was estimated to have the eighth highest rate of opiate abuse in the world.<sup>560</sup> The number of its actual drug addicts was almost certainly much higher, as only those addicts receiving treatment – a small fraction – were registered. In 2002, UNODC estimated the true number of addicts to be perhaps twelve times higher than official figures.<sup>561</sup> It should be noted that this was a cyclical relationship: the drugs trade helped increase addiction rates, creating more demand, and thus boosting the drugs trade.

In sum, narco-trafficking led to civilian suffering by perpetuating a violent and predatory environment, conditions of deprivation and coercion, and serious legal and medical risks.

#### **4.3.3 Organised Crime and Corruption**

The trade in illicit drugs may have received the most attention but the illicit trade of otherwise licit goods – such as cotton and aluminium, two of the largest industries in Tajikistan – were also significant enterprises at this time for Tajikistan's organised crime groups. According to Galeotti, cotton smuggling was 'second only to the drugs trade in Tajikistan's criminal economy'.<sup>562</sup> In July 1995, President Rahmonov blamed a 'cotton mafia war' for a spike in attacks on police and politicians, noting that cotton smuggling operations had increased fivefold over the previous year.<sup>563</sup> Aluminium was another potential source of wealth for the country, but the fact it could be exported for hard currency made it a particularly attractive target for smuggling and embezzlement. In 1996, for example, it was estimated that half the total amount of aluminium produced in Tajikistan – 100,000 tonnes – was illegally exported by corrupt officials.<sup>564</sup> Competition over the Tursunzade aluminium smelter and its revenues led to armed clashes among former PFT commanders and local warlords for a number of years, before the regime finally took firm control of the facility in 2004.<sup>565</sup>

Given the anarchic state of Tajik society, virtually any product or production site could become a target for illicit activity and the cause of violent competition. In April 1994, for example, eight people were killed when a dispute over control of a successful winery near Dushanbe turned violent:

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<sup>560</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 964.

<sup>561</sup> Engvall (2006), 841.

<sup>562</sup> Galeotti (1995), 72. See also: AP, 10/2/96.

<sup>563</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/7/95; AP, 25/7/95.

<sup>564</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/10/96; *Moscow Times*, 18/2/97.

<sup>565</sup> Matveeva (2009), 26. On corruption and the cotton and aluminium sectors, see Nakaya (2009), 266-68.



*The incident took place Thursday night, after the deputy police chief – who controls one local gang – invited his rival, the winery manager, to his house for the evening. The winery manager arrived with six of his relatives. A dispute apparently erupted between the police chief and the winery manager over control of the plant. Then the police chief's supporters allegedly trapped the guests, killed them and burned their bodies. In revenge, supporters of the slain winery manager kidnapped the deputy police chief, shot him dead and set his body ablaze.*<sup>566</sup>

All of those involved were reportedly former PFT members. Whilst the police, under unusual pressure from the Interior Ministry, did arrest one man, he was reportedly seized from jail by relatives of the slain men and they 'literally tore him to pieces'.<sup>567</sup> This incident encapsulates many of the features of violence during this period: the police chief-slash-gang leader; the localised and micro-level dispute; the extreme violence and post-death atrocities; blood feud; and the ultimate ineffectiveness of the police.

Whilst such criminal competition tended to victimise civilians as bystanders, other forms of criminality led more directly to civilian suffering, such as the rampant speculation and theft in food supplies that exacerbated the country's difficulties in feeding its population. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization placed Tajikistan on a list of twenty countries most threatened by starvation in December 1993, at the same time that basic foodstuffs were commanding sky-high prices on the black market.<sup>568</sup>

A key vehicle for civilian suffering was corruption, which was plainly visible not only in the disappearance of humanitarian aid before it reached civilians but in the expensive cars and houses flaunted by Dushanbe's nouveau-riche. The gradual consolidation of Kulyabi control in the political and security spheres had not included the resumption of responsible governance; according to Roy, 'The Kulabis methodically set about plundering official positions and sources of wealth for the benefit of their faction, and had no interest whatsoever in running the state. This predatory attitude destroyed the economy and led to their fellow regionalist factions [from Leninabad and Hissar] going into opposition'.<sup>569</sup> Instead of working together to restore

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<sup>566</sup> UPI, 29/4/94.

<sup>567</sup> BBC, 3/5/94.

<sup>568</sup> On the food crisis and black markets, see: AFP, 21/12/93(a); UPI, 17/1/95.

<sup>569</sup> Roy (2007), 141.

order to the public's political and economic affairs, competing patronage networks and regional clans fought over the 'spoils of victory'.<sup>570</sup>

The stark contrast between wealthy and corrupt elites and the bread lines and freezing homes of most of the population periodically generated unrest and demonstrations in Dushanbe and other cities. The May 1996 mass protests in Khujand and Ura-Tyube, for example, included calls for 'better food supplies and more effective measures against crime' as well as political aims such as greater autonomy and the removal of Kulyabi administrators and officials.<sup>571</sup> (Corruption and criminality also became a frequent charge levied against the regime by its leading *bêtes noires*, such as Khudoberdyev.) Corruption also stymied economic reconstruction, as profits from the few resources Tajikistan did possess (cotton, aluminium) were diverted to local warlords and corrupt officials. Nakaya notes, 'Commanders of armed groups and district authorities grabbed agricultural farms by force and used profits from cotton production to buy properties made available through privatization, such as apartments, shopping centres and restaurants'.<sup>572</sup> Corruption was thoroughly embedded in Tajik political and economic structures – including the law enforcement and security sectors meant to combat it – due to continuity with Soviet-era governance styles and the Kulyabi/PFT takeover of the state.

Organised crime and corruption victimised civilians in a number of ways. First, organised crime groups and corrupt official actors – particularly, the new security forces – engaged in violent and predatory activities that directly targeted civilians or caused predictable collateral damage. Second, organised crime and corruption prioritised the accrual of private wealth to criminal and political actors, which in conditions of limited resources and capacity left little for the state to function or for civilians to survive. Third, the corruption of political and economic structures precluded the efficient and responsible reconstruction of the state, thus extending the dire and unstable conditions in which Tajiks suffered.

In sum, the flourishing organised crime sector, and the corruption upon which it rested, compounded civilian victimisation from war-fighting by leaving Tajiks to languish in a poor and predatory environment, with little recourse to protection or productive activity within the licit sphere.

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<sup>570</sup> Atkin (1997b), 300; Interview (OSCE-Tajikistan), London, 2009.

<sup>571</sup> UN Security Council Report (June 1996), 2. See also: UN Security Council Report (September 1996), 4; US Department of State (1997), 128; UPI, 17/1/93; BBC/Interfax, 10/4/96; UPI, 21/11/96.

<sup>572</sup> Nakaya (2009), 263.

#### 4.3.4 The Symbiosis of Criminal and Political Violence

The prominent role played by corrupt and criminal actors at this time led to a pervasive perception that much of the ongoing violence was generated by criminal incentives as much as – if not more than – political aims. A number of examples illustrate the intertwining of criminal and political factors. The armed groups clashing with the Russian Border Troops at the Tajik-Afghan border comprised narco-traffickers as well as opposition militants; many believed the conflict in its later stages was not truly about politics but over control of profitable smuggling routes, and that the real reason for Afghan support of the Tajik opposition lay in the opportunity for narco-profits.<sup>573</sup> In Gorno-Badakhshan, shootings and violence – especially around Khorog – were attributed to both ‘the so-called self-defence detachments and open drug and mafia structures’.<sup>574</sup> In 1994, clashes between militias in Kurgan-Tyube were attributed to criminal competition; when security forces were sent to stabilise the region, however, they predominantly targeted Uzbek groups and civilians, apparently in an attempt to assert Kulyabi dominance over political, economic – and criminal – affairs.<sup>575</sup> A grenade attack in a Dushanbe market, initially thought to be terrorism, turned out to be related to ‘a dispute over payment for pies’.<sup>576</sup> Armed clashes in Tursunzade were driven by competition not just between criminal mafias over control of local resources but by their politicised bosses over control of the levers of power in the city.<sup>577</sup> The Boimatov and Khudoberdyev mutinies featured a blend of political and criminal motivations; as noted by Lynch, ‘While the objectives of these field commanders concerned control over local economic resources (such as the aluminium plant in Tursunzade) their political demands could not be discarded’.<sup>578</sup> UNMOT noted that one of the challenges in investigating potential violations of interim agreements was that ‘it is often quite difficult in these cases to distinguish between political and criminal acts’.<sup>579</sup> Even President Rahmonov acknowledged the criminal nature of violence during this time, when he claimed that a ‘cotton mafia war’ and not terrorism lay behind the targeting of police and politicians in 1995.<sup>580</sup> (At the most extreme end of the spectrum, a few observers claimed that the civil war in Tajikistan had actually been fomented by drug dealers: ‘A million dollars invested in inflaming the conflicts brings them a billion dollars in profits’.<sup>581</sup>)

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<sup>573</sup> Marat (2006), 104; Williams (2003), 98; Kuzmin (2001), 193; BBC/Interfax, 23/7/93(b); BBC/Interfax, 11/8/93; *Moscow News*, 17/9/93; UPI, 24/1/94; *The Independent*, 15/4/95; AFP, 15/4/95; RPD/*Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 30/4/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 2/8/95; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/4/96; *Moscow Times*, 17/9/96; AFP, 31/10/96.

<sup>574</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 18/3/94.

<sup>575</sup> US Department of State (1995), 9; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/3/94(a); BBC/Itar-Tass, 10/3/94(b).

<sup>576</sup> BBC/Interfax, 24/3/96.

<sup>577</sup> BBC/Interfax, 13/8/96.

<sup>578</sup> Lynch (2001), 60.

<sup>579</sup> UN Security Council Report (December 1995), 5.

<sup>580</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/7/95; AP, 25/7/95.

<sup>581</sup> BBC, 18/8/94. See also Kuzmin (2001), 193.

The pervasiveness of criminal violence and its dire effects upon the civilian population demonstrate the futility of trying to separate criminal from political violence in a conflict environment as anarchic and decentralised as Tajikistan. The mingling of criminal and strategic incentives for civilian targeting was commonplace, as within such an environment any violence toward civilians had multivarious outcomes – generally, enriching the perpetrator whilst at the same time terrorising the constituents of enemies or rivals, thus weakening their ability to respond. In addition, it is nearly impossible to delineate when criminal means become criminal ends – i.e., when criminality ceases to be a mere mechanism for funding political-militant activity and becomes an end in itself. Few armed groups are exclusively criminal or political: most manage comfortably a hybrid status of pursuing both criminal and political aims.<sup>582</sup> This broad characterisation certainly appears to hold true for non-state armed groups in Tajikistan.

There was one actor in the criminal sphere, however, that largely lacked any political characteristics: Russian servicemen, a notable source of criminal victimisation of Tajik and Afghan civilians. Often living in harsh and dangerous conditions, underpaid and ill-trained, they were frequently accused of robbing, assaulting and otherwise mistreating local civilians, and of participating in cross-border narco-trafficking (according to one counternarcotics official, ‘If you have enough money, you can pay Russian border guards to deliver your opium in helicopters’).<sup>583</sup>

In sum, it is necessary to consider criminal violence in Tajikistan in order to present a comprehensive picture of civilian victimisation during this period. The conditions and opportunities created by the civil war generated a rapid and massive growth in criminal activity that affected civilians far beyond the violence associated with direct military clashes or continued ethnic cleansing.

#### **4.4 The Role of the PFT in Civilian Victimisation**

During the first phase of the war, PFT militias played a key role in all the types of civilian victimisation considered here. Along with opposition militias, they perpetrated massacres and ethnic cleansing in the countryside and targeted civilian population centres. They were

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<sup>582</sup> Makarenko (2004); Mitchell (2010); Engvall (2006), 837.

<sup>583</sup> Tousley (1995), 39; Marat (2006), 106; Williams (2003), 85; Paoli, et al. (2007), 956; Lewis (2008), 177; UN Security Council Report (December 1995), 4; *Moscow News*, 10/9/93; *Manchester Guardian*, 10/4/94; AFP, 18/2/95; AFP, 15/4/95; *New York Times*, 2/5/95; AP, 28/6/95; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 16/11/95; *Moscow Times*, 13/2/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 30/4/96; AFP, 10/9/96; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 16/11/96; Inter-Press Service, 26/11/96.

presumed to be behind much of the ethnic cleansing in Dushanbe following the Kulyabi victory, and they were heavily represented in the government security forces and paramilitaries who targeted civilians during military operations. PFT militias sparked massive refugee flows in southern and eastern Tajikistan, and victimised Gharmi and Pamiri refugees during the resettlement process. Although they did not directly victimise the refugees in Afghanistan, their continued predation within Tajikistan was a major impediment to refugee repatriation. Finally, PFT members were major contributors to the crime and lawlessness that plagued the country during the conflict.

There is another aspect, however, to PFT involvement in civilian victimisation: the way in which they benefited not only from targeting enemy civilians, but from protecting their own constituencies from victimisation by the opposition.<sup>584</sup> During the war, Tajik civilians had few options for protection and survival, other than to try to situate themselves under the umbrella of protection associated with specific political, criminal or militant actors. Indeed, one of the key elements of Safarov's popularity lay in his avowed determination to protect civilians, as noted by a Russian journalist at the time:

*The moment [Safarov] appeared on the stairway of the House of Government a large crowd of women greeted the 'Saviour of the nation' with loud expressions of gratitude. Almost all speakers quoted bobo-Sangak's winged words addressed to the people: 'I will not permit to slaughter you.' I poignantly felt pity for these people: a criminal was their last defender against other criminals. Herein, perhaps, lies the key to his meteoric rise to prominence.*<sup>585</sup>

Khudoberdyev also set himself up as the 'protector of Uzbeks' in Kurgan-Tyube, creating an official but largely autonomous army brigade several thousand strong for this purpose.<sup>586</sup> According to Nourzhanov, Khudoberdyev 'established a permanent base in Chapayevsk 20 miles south of Qurghonteppa, organised taxation and conscription of the local population and by 1997 developed a well-equipped force of 2000 soldiers in barracks and 5000 in reserve, ready, as he put it, "to protect my people from violence"'.<sup>587</sup> A slightly different protection dynamic was also seen in southern Tajikistan, where local Kulyabi officials and strongmen were

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<sup>584</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 134; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 53.

<sup>585</sup> *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>586</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 121.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.* See also: BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 27/9/95.

able to expand their areas of influence by offering limited forms of protection to returning Gharmi refugees.<sup>588</sup>

There is already considerable consensus as to PFT victimisation during Phase I of the conflict, and these activities have been described in this chapter and the preceding one. Less well examined are the contributions of PFT members to civilian victimisation in Phase II of the conflict, after the official disbandment of the group. This section therefore focuses on PFT activities from 1993 to 1997, providing a new accounting and analysis intended to further the conceptualisation of non-state-actor victimisation during warfare. Specifically, it advances new ways of thinking about how non-state actors continue to victimise civilians after the most intense fighting of a conflict has subsided and the full range of activities available to them in doing so.

The official disbandment of the PFT in 1993 did little to revoke the power and status of its leading commanders. The PFT had always been a loosely coordinated band of local strongmen and criminals, and many of its various factions now continued to operate largely independently in their own local areas. According to Marat, 'Civil war field commanders with strong military authority and access to weapons were the most common actors to gain local authority in rural areas due to their ability to broker drug deals between Afghan and Tajik producers, and interested parties beyond the Central Asian region'.<sup>589</sup> Their influence also grew because the perpetuation of the informal economy required local figures to coordinate and 'police' transactions and arrangements, and field commanders had the authority and resources to do so.<sup>590</sup> In Gharmi (i.e., opposition) areas, however, PFT field commanders were likely to acquire authority due to threats and coercion.

It should be noted that *opposition* field commanders shared similar features in the geographical areas they controlled or operated in. In 1996, a Democratic Party of Tajikistan spokesman said that 'the IRP's influence on field commanders was not that strong and that many of the units led by them were "unmanageable" and were interested primarily in smuggling drugs and weapons'.<sup>591</sup> The primary difference between the two groups was that the PFT field commanders usually had advantageous connections to regime officials and thus greater protection for their activities.

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<sup>588</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 19/5/94.

<sup>589</sup> Marat (2006), 103.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>591</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 8/1/96.

In examining the activities of former PFT members from 1993-1997, it is helpful to consider two organising principles: splits amongst PFT factions, and the emergence of four broad occupational categories into which PFT members fell.

The Kulyabi and Hissari branches of the PFT were never particularly close or coordinated; they were considered as a collective group mainly by virtue of the tactical alliance between Safarov and Kenjaev in the autumn of 1992. But tensions between the two factions noticeably increased in 1993 after Safarov was given the job of creating the new Tajik armed forces (as a result of which he talked openly about his upcoming appointment as defence minister<sup>592</sup>). This meant that the new Tajik army – which would provide enormous opportunities for personal enrichment and power – would be largely Kulyabi. At the same time, under Rahmonov, Kulyabis assumed many of the vacant government positions, leaving Uzbeks and other factions from western Tajikistan out of the new power arrangements. This generated considerable resentment, given the substantial contributions of these groups to the PFT victory.<sup>593</sup> There was also an ethnic dimension to increasing tensions, as the PFT groups from Hissar and western Tajikistan were mostly Uzbek. Within a year, there were reports of armed clashes between Kulyabis and Uzbeks in the Hissar Valley, and Kulyabi security forces who were ostensibly trying to disarm militias in southern Tajikistan were accused of singling out and abusing Uzbek civilians.<sup>594</sup> A large percentage of the Uzbek field commanders were either imprisoned or killed during or just after the war.<sup>595</sup>

Factional tensions arose *within* the Kulyabi camp as well. These rivalries, broadly rooted in geographical origins, were characterised in several different ways. According to one observer:

*... Kulyab actually consisted of four valleys that were competing against each other and that would only unify as Kulyab against a common enemy: the Balzhuvansky, the Dashtidzhumsky, the Khovalinsky and the Sarikhusursky. 'All these valleys have networks that reach up to the top, the President is from the first valley, and from the second is half the government; only the fourth does not have any positions in the Government. Therefore, the people from there were pro-Democrat'.<sup>596</sup>*

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<sup>592</sup> *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>593</sup> Lynch (2001), 58; Slim and Hodizoda (2002), 5; Nakaya (2009), 261; *New York Times*, 21/2/93; BBC/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 21/4/93; AFP, 2/7/93(a).

<sup>594</sup> US State Department (1995), 9; UN Security Council Report (June 1994); Slim and Hodizoda (2002), 5; Lynch (2001), 59.

<sup>595</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007), 331.

<sup>596</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 64. The association of political affiliation with levels of patronage is noteworthy.

New schisms and groupings would continue to emerge within Kulyabi politics. From the late 1990s, Rahmonov consolidated his grip on power and increasingly packed his regime with people not just from Kulyab but from his own hometown; his Danghara faction was rivalled, however, by the Farkhor faction represented by two powerful figures, Mahmadsaid Ubaydullaev and Ghaffor Mirzoyev.<sup>597</sup> (Characterisations of Kulyabi factions invariably seem to be rooted in the solidarity networks attached to specific locales.) Essentially, each faction attempted to maximise its power and profits at the expense of others. Kulyabi groups might unite in the face of competition from other regions, but amongst themselves fierce rivalries continued.

The second organising principle for considering former PFT members at this time is their post-PFT activities and positions. I argue that four broad categories can be discerned: 1) High-level government: those who took powerful positions within the ruling regime; 2) Local administration: those who acquired influential positions in key local areas outside Dushanbe; 3) Security forces: the militias that were incorporated into the various security forces (even if in practice they remained highly autonomous); 4) Criminal militias: militia and mafia groups that remained outside the official orbit, even if they maintained connections with powerful figures.

It should be noted that not all former PFT commanders fell within these categories. In at least one instance, a former PFT field commander headed up the Kulyab office of a well-known NGO supported by the Aga Khan's foundation (the same NGO boasted a former UTO commander in charge of its Tajikabad office).<sup>598</sup> International NGO positions were comparatively very well paid and thus highly sought after. However, it is not clear how many former militiamen chose this career path after disbandment.

Table 4.2 shows where some of the most notable PFT leaders and field commanders fell after 1993. Note that whilst many former PFT members joined criminal militias, their commanders tended to adopt more formal roles whilst still maintaining control over or ties with militia and mafia groups.

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<sup>597</sup> Engvall (2006); ICG (2001a), 13; IWPR, 21/2/05.

<sup>598</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 145-46.



| Table 4.2. Notable PFT Members: Their Post-PFT Positions                             |                      |                        |                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High-ranking government                                                              | Local administration | Security forces        | Criminal militias                                                                    |
| Abdulmajid Dostiev                                                                   | Kadir Abdullaev      | Qurbon Cholov**        | Many PFT leaders had ties to criminal militias, but took on official roles as cover. |
| Khoja Karimov                                                                        | Ibodullo Boimatov*** | Ramazon Emomov         |                                                                                      |
| Safarali Kenjaev*                                                                    | Jamoliddin Mansurov  | Suhrob Kasimov         |                                                                                      |
| Ghaffor Mirzoyev                                                                     | Abdulmalik Salihov** | Mahmud Khudoberdyev*** |                                                                                      |
| Yaqub Salimov**                                                                      |                      | Izatullo Kuganov*      |                                                                                      |
| Mahmadsaid Ubaidullaev**                                                             |                      | Saidshoh Shamolov      |                                                                                      |
| * = assassinated / ** = survived assassination attempt / *** = presumed assassinated |                      |                        |                                                                                      |

The remainder of this section briefly discusses each of these groups and their role in civilian victimisation following the official disbandment of the PFT.

#### High-ranking government

Given the PFT's role in the Kulyabi victory in December 1992 and the elevation of Rahmonov to the presidency, it is not surprising that some of the most powerful figures in Tajikistan early in this period were former PFT field commanders. *Moscow News* reported candidly at the time that 'the victory of the Popular Front over the opposition in the southern regions of Tajikistan was to result in division of the territory and posts in the new government between the criminal groupings'.<sup>599</sup> Rahmonov adopted what Nourzhanov calls a carrot-and-stick approach to PFT leaders, forming alliances with 'about a dozen' of the strongest field commanders whilst trying to 'neutralise' lower-level militia leaders.<sup>600</sup> By 1995, Rahmonov had greatly improved his grip on power: partly via the 'Kulyabisation' of the government and state agencies, and partly by coopting or removing most of the field commanders who could present a security threat to his

<sup>599</sup> *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(a).

<sup>600</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 121.

regime.<sup>601</sup> He would increasingly engage in what Wiegmann calls ‘the career carousel’: abruptly shifting men from one government position to another, to forestall the development of powerful networks that might challenge his rule.<sup>602</sup>

One former field commander who illustrated this evolution was Yaqub Salimov, who as noted earlier became Minister of Internal Affairs when Rahmonov became head of state. This was an incredibly powerful position, with authority over the police and special security forces (including combat-ready forces) as well as the units entrusted with countering organised crime and the drugs trade.<sup>603</sup> Salimov made the most of this post, filling the security services with his own militia members, many of them criminals. He reportedly founded ‘the first large-scale Tajik drug trafficking group’.<sup>604</sup> According to Nourzhanov, ‘The Sixth Department of the Ministry of the Interior in charge of combating organized crime was entrusted to an individual who had spent 17 years behind bars. The rank-and-file members of the police were little better: one-third of them were purged from the force after Salimov quit in August 1995’.<sup>605</sup> However, despite the power and influence he had acquired, Salimov was dismissed in 1995 after becoming ‘increasingly out of control’ and insubordinate.<sup>606</sup> He later fled the country, after supporting Khudoberdyev’s failed rebellion of November 1998, but in 2003 was extradited to Tajikistan, convicted of treason, banditry and abuse of office, and sentenced to fifteen years in prison.<sup>607</sup>

Some former PFT leaders have managed to stay in power alongside Rahmonov, such as Mahmadsaid Ubaidullaev, the former PFT leader who as deputy prime minister controlled the cotton and aluminium industries before being forced to resign in the February 1996 Khudoberdyev/Boimatov mutiny. Shortly after his removal he was appointed mayor of Dushanbe, a position he continues to hold today. He has also been the speaker of the upper house of the Tajik parliament since 2000, and has become known as the ‘second most powerful politician in Tajikistan’ after Rahmonov.<sup>608</sup> One of the country’s wealthiest men, he is also alleged to be a major figure in the narcotics business.<sup>609</sup> More typical, however, is the story of Khoja Karimov, a former PFT field commander who became a member of parliament (along with a number of other PFT members: in the 1995 elections, 42 of 176 deputies were

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<sup>601</sup> The term ‘Kulyabisation’ appears to have originated in Akiner (2001), 64. See also Rubin (1998), 131.

<sup>602</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 135. See also: Nakaya (2009).

<sup>603</sup> AFP, 2/7/93(a); AFP, 7/11/94(b).

<sup>604</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 969.

<sup>605</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 119. See also: US Department of State (1996), 104; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 29/9/95.

<sup>606</sup> Akiner (2001), 91; Kuzmin (2001), 196; UPI, 14/8/95.

<sup>607</sup> Marat (2006), 108; Lewis (2008), 173; RFE/RL, 27/4/05.

<sup>608</sup> Kayani (2006), 157; Markowitz (2010), 165; ICG (2001a), 5; RFE/RL, 23/4/10.

<sup>609</sup> Akiner (2001), 71; Marat (2006), 108; Engvall (2006), 848.

former PFT<sup>610</sup>). In 1995 he was arrested and charged with the wartime murder of three Supreme Soviet deputies.<sup>611</sup> Like a number of other PFT figures, he had enjoyed immunity for his crimes until there was a political incentive to remove him.<sup>612</sup>

As a group, these PFT leaders were now victimising civilians in two primary ways. First, by exploiting their offices to engage in corrupt and criminal behaviour, and contributing to the establishment of drugs and organised crime networks, they perpetuated the conditions of poverty, criminality and violence that led to civilian suffering during this period. Second, they created and presided over corrupt and brutal security forces that intimidated, robbed and assaulted the civilian population, and must share the responsibility for these abuses.

#### Local administration

Some PFT members saw more advantage in staying rooted in their local constituencies. A prime example here is Ibodullo Boimatov, whose exploits in Tursunzade were noted earlier. He had been a primary supplier of arms to the PFT-Hissar, via his criminal connections in Uzbekistan, and after victory in Dushanbe he claimed the mayorship of Tursunzade.

*[He] stayed in office for more than a year, safeguarded by a full battalion of the former PFT soldiers on his payroll. The money came from the Tursunzoda aluminium smelter that Boimatov treated as his property. These protectors of public order, as their commander coyly admitted, 'occasionally committed accidents bordering on brutality, and even some murders took place'.<sup>613</sup>*

In 1994, he was briefly removed from his post, reportedly for 'turning his guerrilla force into a municipal police force', but reinstated with Rahmonov's support.<sup>614</sup> However, in 1995 he was removed by Rahmonov and fled to Uzbekistan, where he regrouped and returned to Tursunzade in the coterminous mutiny with Khudoberdyev in January 1996. He briefly resumed the mayoral post before being chased back to Uzbekistan again, this time by another local warlord and former PFT field commander – the Tursunzade police chief, Kadir Abdullaev (who, as noted earlier, was himself later forced out of Tursunzade by Khudoberdyev).<sup>615</sup> The

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<sup>610</sup> Kuzmin (2001), 200.

<sup>611</sup> Hall (2005), 26; BBC/Interfax, 3/11/95.

<sup>612</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 51; ICG (2003), 15.

<sup>613</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 120. See also: Atkin (1997b), 302.

<sup>614</sup> *Moscow Times*, 17/11/94. This brief removal explains why much of the literature refers to him leaving Tursunzade in 1994 instead of 1995, but contemporary reportage shows him still in the mayoral post through 1994; see *Washington Post*, 7/12/94.

<sup>615</sup> Akiner (2001), 89.

US State Department took note of the violence that accompanied this power struggle:

*Since mid-August [1996], an extended series of clashes between two groups seeking to control Tursunzade has resulted in at least 30 deaths; some of those killed were unarmed bystanders. These killings do not appear to be connected with the Government's conflict with the opposition, but reflect the lack of governmental control and the arrogation of local authority by regional strongmen.*<sup>616</sup>

Throughout Tajikistan, former PFT field commanders took up municipal positions and thus gained potential cover for their more nefarious activities (opposition commanders would do the same after the 1997 peace agreement).<sup>617</sup> Their contribution to civilian victimisation was similar to that of the high-ranking government officials, in that they promoted an environment of poverty, criminality and violence, and their followers victimised civilians directly. Yet because they operated at a more local level, their victims were more likely to be their local constituents and the geographical scope of their influence was more limited. Boimatov and Abdullaev, for example, inflicted a substantial amount of violence and criminality on the residents of a city they both claimed to represent.

#### Security forces

The clashes between the army brigades led by Khudoberdyev and Kuganov in Kurgan-Tyube in 1995 and Khudoberdyev's subsequent mutinies in 1996 and 1997 (described in Chapter 3) illustrate well the perils associated with placing PFT field commanders at the head of official security forces staffed with their own militiamen. Throughout this period, Rahmonov had to fear challenges from largely autonomous army units. Fortunately for him, the security forces were usually focused on personal gain and local influence rather than political challenges to the regime. (Khudoberdyev would prove an exception to this again in the postwar era, as described in Chapter 7.)

A typical example of this category was Suhrob Kasimov, who had led a relatively small self-defence unit in 1992 but, being from Danghara, was promoted quickly by Rahmonov himself. He assumed command of one of the strongest security forces – Interior's 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Brigade – and established a relatively autonomous personal fiefdom in the Varzob Valley, using

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<sup>616</sup> US State Department (1997), 124. See also: BBC/Interfax, 13/8/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 17/8/96; BBC/Itar-Tass, 23/8/96(b).

<sup>617</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 123; BBC/Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 21/4/93; BBC/Interfax, 14/7/95.

his newfound power and funds to control local businesses and networks.<sup>618</sup> In the postwar era, he played a key role in quelling two Khudoberdyev mutinies and engaged in ethnic cleansing activities in Kurgan-Tyube.<sup>619</sup> He also headed the Tajik national football association for ten years (until replaced by Rahmonov's son, Rustam, in 2012) and was known as 'fantastically wealthy' even after he retired his military command.<sup>620</sup> Other former PFT field commanders were given influential positions in the border guards, where they could exploit the myriad opportunities for personal enrichment. These included Qurbon Cholov and Saidshoh Shamolov, who were reportedly involved in drugs trafficking whilst serving as high-ranking officers at the Tajik-Afghan border.<sup>621</sup> Cholov was eventually imprisoned, whilst Shamolov was assigned a diplomatic post in China. Another former PFT field commander, Ramazon Emomov, was a senior officer in the border forces for ten years before being arrested for trafficking drugs worth more than \$140,000.<sup>622</sup>

The new security forces, which were predominantly led and staffed by former PFT and Kulyabis, contributed to civilian victimisation in a number of ways during this period. First, it should be noted that it is only in this category that one finds civilian victimisation as a result of combat operations, as these security forces played a key role in government counteroffensives against the opposition. One of the most notorious in this regard was the aforementioned Faizali Brigade, which targeted civilians during operations in Gharm and Tavildara (in addition to generating civilian casualties during its clashes with Khudoberdyev's brigade in Kurgan-Tyube in 1995). Second, the various security forces in Tajikistan were consistently recognised as the prime source of human rights abuses during this period.<sup>623</sup> Their powers to arrest and detain people combined with their de facto immunity from prosecution created huge incentives to abuse civilians for profit, revenge or other motivations. Extortion and kidnapping for ransom, for example, were commonly engaged in.<sup>624</sup> Third, the security forces were key actors in the growing criminal networks afflicting Tajik society during this period. As noted earlier, much of the drugs trade relied upon the services or complicity of the formal security sector. Finally, the perversion of the traditional role of the security forces – the fact that they became a vector for victimisation rather than a tool for preventing it – not only facilitated

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<sup>618</sup> Akiner (2001), 90; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 54; Matveeva (2009), 48.

<sup>619</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 123; Lubin, et al. (1999), 52.

<sup>620</sup> Akiner (2001), 91; Lewis (2008), 176.

<sup>621</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 125; Lewis (2008), 173; Hall (2005), 27.

<sup>622</sup> BBC/VIRI, 7/8/05.

<sup>623</sup> See US State Department and Human Rights Watch reports for 1993-1997.

<sup>624</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 116; Human Rights Watch (1994b), 2; *Moscow News*, 17/2/96; *The Observer*, 9/2/97; BBC/Tajik Radio, 25/2/97.

violence directed at the civilian population but contributed significantly to the growing 'criminalisation of society'.<sup>625</sup>

### Criminal militias

Some PFT groups continued to operate as criminal militias completely outside government control, although they may have continued to take advantage of connections to high-level officials. No longer engaged in war-fighting, they turned to crime and victimisation in the service of personal survival and enrichment (although some continued to depict themselves as self-defence detachments).<sup>626</sup> Human Rights Watch reported in 1993:

*Various paramilitary groups – some believed to have emerged from the Popular Front – continue to threaten human rights and public order in Tajikistan by killing, seizing hostages, and robbing and occupying homes. Their targets have mainly been opposition activists and people of Pamiri and Gharmi origins, and they have threatened or carried out acts of violence sometimes in the presence of law enforcement officials.*<sup>627</sup>

The existence of such groups was noted even before the death of Safarov: 'Some of bobo-Sangak's former confederates have refused to acknowledge his one-man leadership and now operate in the mountains on their own'.<sup>628</sup> Southern Tajikistan was plagued by 'relatively small groups of armed men who went around plundering farms, setting up checkpoints, kidnapping people for ransom, and extorting money in other ways. There were quite a few such gangs in 1993, particularly in and around Kulob'.<sup>629</sup> In Dushanbe as well, militias carved up urban turf and clashed frequently throughout 1993-1994, before a degree of political and criminal consolidation took hold.<sup>630</sup> The US State Department noted that for 1994,

*There were a substantial number of extrajudicial killings, but fewer than in 1993...The primary culprits are the paramilitary groups which were not disarmed or disbanded after the war. While the government has attempted to incorporate these groups into the recently created Ministry of Defense, many groups operated well outside government control as informal militias and private armies. According to credible reports, these groups operated*

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<sup>625</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 72; Engvall (2006), 846.

<sup>626</sup> BBC, 10/3/94(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 20/12/94.

<sup>627</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993), 2.

<sup>628</sup> *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(b).

<sup>629</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 119.

<sup>630</sup> On urban militias in Dushanbe, see Driscoll (2009).

*with the tacit approval of some high-ranking officials within the Government, including the Minister of the Interior and officials at the Ministries of Defense and Security. No government or security official, the majority of whom are ethnic Kulyabis, was prosecuted for an extrajudicial killing. If the alleged perpetrator of a crime was of Kulyabi origin, the procurator's office dropped all charges and closed the cases.*<sup>631</sup>

This sense of impunity amongst Kulyabi militias was devastating for civilians, as it left them completely vulnerable to predation. As noted earlier, the government gradually neutralised many of the low-level 'bandit groups' over the next few years, but the more powerful criminal groups remained.

The PFT members who formed such criminal militias were amongst the most direct perpetrators of civilian victimisation during this period. The fact that their motives were usually criminal or personal, rather than political or strategic, does not detract from the levels of violence and predation they inflicted upon civilians.

In sum, the Tajik population suffered at the hands of many different perpetrators during this period, but by virtue of Kulyabi control of the regime and the security services it can be suggested that former PFT field commanders and members were amongst the worst transgressors in the postwar era. Refugee victimisation, except in northern Afghanistan, lay largely in the hands of the regime and security forces. Rampant criminality was encouraged by official corruption, de facto immunity for offenders, and abusive security forces – all of which were driven by the Kulyabi takeover and dominance of the institutions of state authority. Competition between militias attached to PFT or Kulyabi leaders led to armed clashes in which civilians died. Ethnic cleansing attacks against Gharmis and Uzbeks continued to occur in southern Tajikistan.

In short, the 'Kulyabisation' of Tajikistan facilitated a range of activities that victimised civilians. The dominance of one regional faction and its refusal to share power not only perpetuated the civil war but limited the potential for the aspects of good governance that might have limited damage to the population (e.g., non-corrupt police and security services, a functioning licit economy, rule of law). The fragility of the early Rahmonov regime allowed criminality and violence to dominate the political, economic and social spheres, and the opportunities for corruption were so large that greater considerations of public welfare were put aside. The

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<sup>631</sup> US State Department (1995), 2.

enormous new opportunities for wealth that accompanied the burgeoning drugs trade fuelled the expansion of organised crime networks and corrupt patronage relationships.

According to Barnett Rubin, 'Neither side distinguished itself by humanitarian conduct in this war' but 'ultimately the side that won managed to commit more atrocities'.<sup>632</sup> The fact that opposition militias also victimised the population should not obscure the leading role played by the PFT in civilian victimisation during the war.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a typology of civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war, and examined the role of the PFT in perpetrating such behaviour during both phases of the conflict. I argue that a comprehensive accounting of civilian victimisation should include not only massacres, ethnic cleansing and displacement, but the criminality and lawlessness that accompany periods of conflict. Finally, I suggest that the PFT, as the victorious party to the conflict and the leading figures of the postwar political and security structures, were fully immersed in victimisation behaviour and indeed were probably the leading transgressors during the conflict as a whole.

Having identified the types of victimisation that occurred and situated the PFT within them – in other words, having clarified the kind of behaviour that the PFT engaged in – it is now possible to turn to a consideration of the incentives that drove them to participate in civilian victimisation.

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<sup>632</sup> Quoted in *New York Times*, 26/11/93.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WHY DID THE POPULAR FRONT VICTIMISE CIVILIANS? AN INCENTIVES-BASED ANALYSIS

This chapter serves as the third step in the strategic-approach analysis of civilian victimisation by the Popular Front of Tajikistan. It addresses one of the primary elements of the central research question – *why did the PFT engage in civilian victimisation?* – by constructing an incentives-based model and applying it to the empirical evidence presented in previous chapters. It evaluates the range of incentives that existed for the PFT and concludes that whilst their relative strength varied over time, in general the incentives to victimise civilians were stronger than the incentives to use restraint in targeting behaviour.

The rationale for approaching the drivers of civilian victimisation as ‘incentives’ rather than ‘motivations’ is as follows. Whilst individuals may engage in violence for expressive reasons having to do with revenge, anger, greed or simple brutality, at the unit level one may assume a certain instrumental purpose to violence against civilians.<sup>633</sup> For a non-state force, there is some purpose to its *collective* violence – even if it is something as basic as the continued existence of the group. This purpose combined with self-interest imperatives tends to lead to limits (however extreme) being placed on violent activity, such as in the consideration of targets, levels of brutality, geographical scope and time. Indeed, Chapter 4 revealed some of the limits of civilian victimisation – limits that cannot be explained by, for example, material capabilities alone.

However, when it comes to the drivers of non-state actor behaviour, a certain opacity of motivation exists that renders their theorisation difficult.<sup>634</sup> A non-state armed force may claim to be acting for political motivations rather than admit that greed or more salacious motivations drive their actions. Locally inspired groups may claim allegiance to transnational ideologies such as world communism or global jihad in order to obtain financing from foreign sponsors or raise their profile. A group may be motivated by a range of factors or competing interests – especially when internal divisions are prominent – and yet reduce this ideational brew to one strong explanatory narrative in order to attract popular support.<sup>635</sup> In short, it is difficult to ‘prove’ motivation on the part of non-state actors – especially since, relative to

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<sup>633</sup> On the instrumentality of unit-level violence, see: Smith (2005), 34-35; Kalyvas (1999); Duyvesteyn (2005).

<sup>634</sup> On the conceptual problems vis-à-vis motives, see Kalyvas (2006), 24, and Kalyvas (1999), 246.

<sup>635</sup> Pearlman (2010).

state armed forces, there is a lack of bureaucratic and official communications that can be parsed for true motives.

Thus, it is analytically more transparent to speak in terms of incentives for behaviour rather than motivations. Incentives refer to largely exogenous factors that are present and available to influence an actor; by considering a range of incentives relevant to a particular decision, it is possible to convey the attractiveness of different options from the point of view of an actor. This approach still saves room for an actor's ideational inclinations, as it assumes an actor's preference structure (i.e., the way in which it prioritises its preferred outcomes, which is highly influenced by ideational as well as strategic elements) will affect its perception of desirable actions. However, the explanatory value of this approach does not depend on the 'truthfulness' of ideological aims as personal drivers of behaviour, as would be the case in a motivation-based model.

This approach further presumes that each option in a decision scenario – such as civilian victimisation vs. restraint – possesses a set of incentives and disincentives that are weighed against each other in some fashion, and that in the case of civilian victimisation by non-state actors these incentives and disincentives may be grouped into three broad categories: normative, strategic and criminal. Target selection has historically been influenced by a combination of these considerations. Military commanders select targets for attack based on expectations of how eliminating or neutralising a given object or actor may contribute to the achievement of strategic and operational objectives; but their choice of eligible targets is constrained by both societal and state-based norms, which can be thought of as forming the 'left and right boundaries of military action'.<sup>636</sup> In a strategic environment of intrastate warfare, criminality is also a major consideration, given the need for combatants to engage in illicit sources of funding and the competition over illicit extraction that often lies at the heart of such conflicts.

Thus, as noted in the Introduction, it is possible to conceptualise an incentives-based model for civilian victimisation thusly:

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<sup>636</sup> Testimony of General Klaus Reinhardt before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 3 May 2004 (available at <http://www.un.org/icty/cases-e/index-e.htm>).

| <b>Table 5.1 Incentives for Civilian Victimisation by Non-State Actors</b> |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Category of Incentives</b>                                              | <b>Binary Choice</b> |
| Normative                                                                  | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |
| Strategic                                                                  | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |
| Criminal                                                                   | Restraint            |
|                                                                            | Victimisation        |

As discussed in Chapter 1's literature review, these categories and variables have been drawn from a review of the academic literature in security, political economy and constructivist approaches, as well as empirical case studies. They represent *possible* factors involved in non-state actor behaviour, but they will vary in strength and across time.

The need for a range of incentives is evident from examination of the Tajik war, where civilians were targeted for an admixture of reasons, including: to acquire control over villages and territory; to steal or extort money and resources, thereby increasing one's material and normative status; to reward followers and disadvantage the competition; to appease the desire for revenge. Many of the incentives for non-state civilian victimisation during this period stemmed from the lack of legitimate sources of money and livelihoods in the conflict economy, and the easy availability of weapons did little to discourage criminality and militancy. In short, to attempt an explanation of civilian victimisation by focusing on only one set of potential drivers would likely offer only a partial answer to this complex phenomenon.<sup>637</sup>

This chapter considers each of the six categories of incentives in turn. For each one, I briefly describe the leading variables in general terms, based upon a thorough review of relevant

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<sup>637</sup> Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

literature, before applying this incentives structure directly to the Tajik case. I conclude the chapter by evaluating the strength of the incentive categories over time, and the ways in which the interplay between the different incentives manifested itself in targeting behaviour.

## 5.1 Normative Incentives for Restraint

In the modern era, normative considerations of who may be targeted in war and in what ways are largely implemented and promulgated at the state level. Principles such as distinction, proportionality and necessity have become enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL) and the military doctrines of many states.<sup>638</sup> If adhered to closely, they can be said to constitute a strategy of restraint in warfare vis-à-vis civilians, in the sense that effort is taken to constrain the use of force in such a way as to minimise civilian casualties, even in situations where this may compromise military effectiveness.

The general principle in all armed conflicts – whether reinforced by international legal treaties or customary law – is that civilians enjoy legal protection and should not be targeted.<sup>639</sup> The *quid pro quo* for civilians is that they retain protected status only so long as they refrain from participating in violent activity.<sup>640</sup> All armed forces in an intrastate conflict are expected to distinguish between military and civilian targets and refrain from excessive and/or unnecessary force; both state and non-state actors should avoid attacks that intentionally target civilians as well as the indiscriminate, disproportionate or perfidious use of force.<sup>641</sup>

Thus, international legal norms are not nonexistent in intrastate warfare, but they continue to be relatively weak compared to interstate conflict and conventional war, in part because non-state forces often have little incentive to adhere to IHL.<sup>642</sup> First, while non-state forces have fewer problems with distinction than state forces – as government and state military forces are easily identifiable – the requirement to clearly distinguish oneself as a member of an armed force separate from the civilian population conflicts with the requirement of

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<sup>638</sup> On IHL issues relevant to the topic of this dissertation, see: Rogers (2004); Walzer (2006); Kassimeris (2006); Dworkin (2006); Lammers (1990); Nardin (1996); Garraway (2006); Corn (2006); Hoffman (2005); McDonald (2004); Meisels (2007); Johnson and Kelsay (1990).

<sup>639</sup> Civilian protection was extended in the 1977 Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions to include both international and non-international armed conflicts; not all states have signed the Protocol but it is generally perceived to reflect customary international law at the least. Gow (2003), 19.

<sup>640</sup> McDonald (2004), 8.

<sup>641</sup> *Indiscriminate* attacks involve a lack of effort to distinguish between military and civilian casualties; *disproportionate* attacks result in civilian casualties that are excessive relative to military gain; *perfidious* attacks are those in which combatants pretend to be civilians in order to carry out the attack. All of these violate IHL.

<sup>642</sup> See Bangerter (2011) for an excellent review of the incentives and disincentives that armed groups face with respect to adhering to IHL.

concealment and stealth faced by many insurgents.<sup>643</sup> Second, their inherent weakness relative to state forces means that the type of targets and attacks permitted by international law are those that are most difficult for them to enact – i.e., direct attacks on usually well-protected and/or well-armed government and military installations and personnel.<sup>644</sup> Third, non-state forces will also have less incentive to follow IHL if the state does not. States confronted with non-state adversaries are likely to kill civilians, either deliberately or due to difficulties in distinction with a non-state force embedded amongst the civilian population, thereby removing incentives for restraint from non-state forces.<sup>645</sup>

In the case of the Tajik civil war, the general weakness of IHL in intrastate conflict was further enhanced, for two primary reasons. First, the historical and political development of Tajikistan – only recently liberated from the Soviet empire and its normative and legal constructs – meant that there was no longstanding tradition of Tajik adherence to IHL. Tajikistan had barely begun to immerse itself in the international legal order before war descended. Second, the Tajik civil war was a rare case of an intrastate war with no state armed force during its most intense phase. The first year of the war was essentially fought amongst non-state militias representing different political and regional factions, with little international attention or pressure to observe IHL and few viable mechanisms to transmit any such attention to the autonomous paramilitaries roaming the countryside. In short, the non-state participants in the conflict had not been steeped in the practice of IHL and would not have been concerned about possible sanctions for violating it, especially when all parties to the conflict were guilty of victimisation.

There is no evidence to suggest that the PFT possessed any consideration for IHL during Phase I of the conflict – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the largely criminal origins of its leadership and members. To the extent that leaders expressed any concern for the law, it was to emphasise their role in supporting the legally installed rulers of the republic, a status that bestowed upon them a heightened sense of legitimacy. Given the clear and open violations of IHL that they tolerated in the first year of the war – such as ethnic cleansing in Dushanbe and Kurgan-Tyube – it does not appear that the PFT made any serious effort to adhere to IHL in their war-fighting.

One might expect that PFT members would have a greater appreciation for IHL during Phase II of the conflict, when they had been incorporated into new state political and security entities, hosted UN and other international observers, and seen Tajikistan increasingly commit itself to

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<sup>643</sup> Campbell (1990), 108.

<sup>644</sup> Ganor (2002), 289.

<sup>645</sup> Valentino, et al. (2004), 384; Bangerter (2011), 379.

international norms. As Chapter 4 showed, however, former PFT units continued to victimise civilians during government operations as well as via attacks on refugees and participation in criminal networks. It seems that during this phase the Tajik regime was more aware of the need to *appear* to adhere to IHL, but this did not necessarily translate into actually doing so. For example, the regime claimed before a January 1993 Karategin offensive that it would not utilise tanks or aircraft, specifically in order to minimise civilian casualties – but did so anyway, resulting in significant civilian casualties and displacement.<sup>646</sup>

In sum, I argue that the normative traditions of IHL constituted an extremely weak incentive for the PFT throughout the Tajik conflict, as a result of the structural deficiencies of IHL in intrastate war as well as the particular political and strategic characteristics of the Tajik conflict.

It is important to note that IHL, developed largely within the European and American normative systems, is not the only systematised source of normative restraints in warfare, particularly in parts of the world excluded from this process of norm development – such as the Islamic world, where a similar elaboration of the laws of war and limits on civilian targeting emerged concomitantly but distinctly.<sup>647</sup> In addition, there is growing recognition of the importance of non-state actor ‘codes of conduct’ in modern warfare, many of which – from Mao to the Taliban – prohibit various forms of civilian victimisation.<sup>648</sup> However, there is no evidence to suggest that either of these normative systems was relevant to PFT conduct. There is not a single reference in the literature or contemporary reportage to a PFT code of conduct, and no indication that they were influenced by traditional Islamic law of war.

Systems of international law are not the only normative influence on target selection in warfare. Societal norms, or expectations of behaviour rooted in sociocultural traditions as opposed to interstate political relations, also play an important role. In particular, the prohibition of the killing of unarmed civilians – an apparently strong norm throughout history and across cultures – should provide protection to civilians in intrastate war regardless of the applicability of legal norms.<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>646</sup> Akiner (2001), 48; Matveeva (2009), 22; Dailey (1994), 17; Human Rights Watch (1993), xxii; Amnesty International (1993), 5; AP, 11/1/93; AP, 15/1/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 12/1/93; Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 12/1/93; BBC/Itar-Tass, 15/1/93(a); RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/1/93; *The Times*, 28/1/93.

<sup>647</sup> Haddad (1983); Tibi (1996); Aboul-Enein (2004); Wiktorowicz (2006); Kelsay and Johnson (1991); ICG (2005); Venkatraman (2007); Johnson and Kelsay (1990).

<sup>648</sup> See van Amstel (2011) for a collection of NSA codes of conduct. See also Giustozzi (2008), Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>649</sup> Walzer (1977), 42; Greenwood (2003). For a useful model of norm strength, see Legro (1995), 15-16. For a discussion of strong vs weak norms, see Farrell (2005), 459-463.

It does not appear that societal norms themselves were weak during the Tajik war. Throughout the conflict, Tajiks – including the PFT – bemoaned the loss of civilian life and castigated the perpetrators. However, I argue that whilst societal norms against civilian victimisation remained strong, the strategic environment of intrastate war generated additional normative mechanisms that allowed perpetrators like the PFT to victimise civilians whilst claiming to abide by societal norms against unlawful killing. These mechanisms are discussed in the next section on the normative incentives for victimisation.

| <b>Table 5.2. Normative Incentives for Restraint</b> |                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| International Humanitarian Law                       | Weak                                             |
| NSA Codes of Conduct                                 | Weak                                             |
| Societal Norms                                       | Strong but overridden by Normative-Victimisation |

## 5.2 Normative Incentives for Civilian Victimisation: The Construction of Alternative Norms

The fact that societal norms against the killing of civilians are regularly transgressed despite their apparent strength and endurance indicates that some alternative mechanisms must be at work that allow these norms to break down in times of conflict. The incentives model used here considers five such mechanisms: norm-stretching; demonisation; defensive threat perceptions; ‘blood feud’ traditions; and utopian ideologies.

Whilst social actors are generally hesitant to engage in outright violations of norms, they may engage in a process known as norm-stretching, in which the limits of acceptable action are pushed or recast – usually in response to what are framed as exceptional and dire circumstances.<sup>650</sup> Normative injunctions against killing are generally superseded by norms allowing for self-defence in the face of severe harm or death to one’s self or family; this concept is often transmuted to allow for self-defence at the group or state level against existential threats.<sup>651</sup> Norms that delineate the categories of ‘civilian’ and ‘non-civilian’ may also be reshaped to allow the targeting of traditionally exempt participants (such as foreign aid workers and journalists).<sup>652</sup> Norm-stretching mechanisms thus enable conflict actors to perceive transgressive behaviour as a legitimate option.

<sup>650</sup> Farrell (2005), 460.

<sup>651</sup> Nardin (1998), 89; 260-61; Campbell (1990), 112; Ganor (2002), 301; Bangerter (2011), 369.

<sup>652</sup> As an example, see the assessment of Taliban justifications for civilian targeting in Human Rights Watch (2007).

Collective violence generally depends upon ‘us-them categorical distinctions’ for the purpose of mobilising and ordering the use of force as well as identifying targets of attack.<sup>653</sup> This process of distinction may be thought of as demonisation when it depicts the adversary as not merely a situational opponent, or the perpetrator of a specific act that must be responded to, but as an undifferentiated host characterised by some salient feature such as race, religion, ethnicity or political belief. Demonisation often goes hand-in-hand with the promulgation of self-defence rationales for violence; a key element in convincing one’s own constituency of the inherent wickedness of another group is to cast them as not just different but threatening, hostile and poised to attack.<sup>654</sup> This normative process is especially important in civil wars, where adversaries are neighbours and countrymen with many similar elements of identity and shared experiences.<sup>655</sup> (For example, it helps explain how the residents of cities such as Sarajevo and Baghdad, who had previously intermarried and lived in commingled neighbourhoods for decades, could fall prey to sectarian hostility promulgated by political actors.) Adversaries are also usually presented as ‘guilty’ of some horrific act or ongoing oppression, and thus deserving of punishment.<sup>656</sup> In Rwanda, for example, Hutu extremists successfully depicted the Tutsis as unlawful oppressors in the years leading up to the 1994 genocide. Minority groups may also be labelled as subversive elements, a type of disease threatening to destroy the body politic, as with the Jews in Nazi Europe or the Kosovo Albanians in Milosevic’s Serbia. The process of demonisation serves a key function in target selection by transforming what would otherwise be an act of murder into an honourable and necessary course of action, namely the punishment and removal of ‘guilty’ persons.

A third key element in the overriding of social norms against civilian victimisation is the embedding of self-defence perceptions amongst conflict actors, a common process in communal conflicts featuring real or imagined security dilemmas on the part of specific constituencies.<sup>657</sup> Self-defence arguments facilitate preemptive violence against communities seen as threatening as well as retaliatory violence against those associated with actual attacks. An emphasis on self-defence helps to mitigate consideration of the counterproductive effects of civilian victimisation by prioritising the need to counter an immediate threat – especially an existential threat – over the achievement of longer-term political objectives.

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<sup>653</sup> Kathleen Taylor (2006), 251; Semelin (2005), 9-51.

<sup>654</sup> Moghadam (2008), 14; Semelin (2005), 48-49.

<sup>655</sup> Yanacopulos and Hanlon (2006), 19; Semelin (2005), 28.

<sup>656</sup> Metz (1993), 14.

<sup>657</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 61; Kassimeris (2006), 10-11; Chenoweth and Lawrence (2010), 7; Center on International Cooperation (2011), 8.



Societies with strong blood feud traditions in peacetime may have an additional mechanism for overcoming norms against victimisation during war. Revenge is a common driver of violence across all civil wars, at both the individual and group level. Blood feud traditions, however, encompass much more than revenge motivations: they represent a longstanding and usually strong system of norms intended to maintain justice and social harmony in local communities.<sup>658</sup> Typically, the family of a killed or injured person assumes a moral imperative to attain some form of compensatory justice and is given some mechanism for obtaining it, which may include the causing of harm (physical or financial) to parties judged responsible for the original injury. When conflict arises in such societies, pre-existing notions of blood feud offer an established framework of justice and legitimacy that may help facilitate ‘norm-stretching’ for the purposes of revenge. It should be noted, however, that blood feud traditions can themselves become warped during war, as their peacetime functions of restraint – for example, in excluding women and children from retribution – become eroded.<sup>659</sup>

Finally, additional normative incentives for victimisation exist when utopian ideologies strongly influence conflict actors.<sup>660</sup> Utopian ideologies promulgate radically revisionist and transformative agendas that seek the creation of an idealised socio-political order, anchored in narratives that view contemporary society as unjust, immoral and oppressive of some core constituency. These narratives also offer mechanisms for radical transformation, usually centred around the moral and/or material rejuvenation of the constituency and the elimination of those elements which prevent or threaten such renewal. Utopian ideologies may be rooted in religious beliefs, secular theories or ethnic particularism, but they are fundamentally political ideologies in that they seek to alter structures and relationships of power within a given society. (Examples of utopian ideologies include communism, National Socialism, eliminationist ethnic movements, and modern salafi-jihadism.<sup>661</sup>) Whilst the specific content of utopian ideologies varies enormously, they share a number of characteristics in terms of the construction of alternative normative systems which influence the treatment of civilians in warfare. They tend to incorporate extremely long timeframes and notions of unconditional victory, thereby undermining one of the key incentives for restraint (namely, to

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<sup>658</sup> The existence of blood feud traditions in pre-modern Europe points to their functionality in societies without formal legal structures, rather than their manifestation in specific and limited regions of the world. *West’s Encyclopedia of American Law* (2008).

<sup>659</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 72.

<sup>660</sup> Ideologies are defined as ‘systems of belief that are elaborate, integrated and coherent, that justify the exercise of power, explain and judge historical events, identify political right and wrong, set forth the interconnections (causal and moral) between politics and other spheres of activity, and furnish guides for action’. McClosky (1964), 362.

<sup>661</sup> For a comparison of jihadist, Nazi and Leninist ideologies, see MacDonald (2007).

limit the scope and duration of war).<sup>662</sup> They are dominated by narratives that demonise adversaries and promote self-defence justifications. The notion of belonging to a ‘vanguard force’ may cause groups to disregard their constituency’s reactions to civilian targeting, or misinterpret a lack of popular support as an indication of the population’s moral weakness rather than distaste for the group’s conduct.<sup>663</sup>

I argue that four of these five alternative normative incentives account for the widespread victimisation of civilians in Tajikistan despite the apparent continuation of societal adherence to the idea that civilians should not be targeted in war. The PFT did not generally argue that they had the right to victimise innocent civilians – instead, they justified their behaviour by invoking a narrative of self-defence against a hostile and illegitimate adversary, one that was easily identified due to prewar cleavages. During the run-up to open conflict, political elites mobilised supporters based on their regional patronage connections, thus establishing associations between adversarial factions and specific regions: Gharmis and Pamiris with the opposition, Kulyabis with the pro-communists. Regional mobilisation thus shaped the organisation of violence and provided the foundation for an ‘us-them’ differentiation based on regionalism. As argued by Kilavuz:

*When the militias began to kill people according to their regional origin, the process itself made regional identity and regionalism one of the most important factors in war. Just being from Garm or the Pamirs became grounds for being killed by pro-government forces, while the opposition came to treat Kulyabis similarly. In order to create loyalty, the warring parties used regional identities and allegiances to create antagonisms towards those from other regions, and thereby generate support for themselves.*<sup>664</sup>

The Kulyabi factions demonised their Gharmi and Pamiri opponents by emphasising their religiosity and alleged foreign connections, depicting them as traitorous and divisive ideologues who would plunge the country into chaos and war. Throughout the conflict, they maintained intense hostility toward what they saw as the potential Islamisation of the state. This should not be confused with hostility toward Islam; even during the Soviet era, traditional religious practices flourished in secrecy. Rather, Kulyabi factions perceived *political* Islam as a

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<sup>662</sup> Martinage (2008), 39; Scheuer (2006). For a game theory analysis of how asymmetric time horizons may lead to an escalation in violence, see Toft (2006).

<sup>663</sup> Mitchell (2008); Naji (2006), 239.

<sup>664</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 189.

threat for several reasons: first, because it represented a stark departure from the status quo, under which many of them benefited; second, because it could prove a potentially divisive factor amongst the country's inhabitants; third, because it could be a vehicle for expanded Iranian influence in the country; and finally, because of the horrific example of neighbouring Afghanistan's bloody conflict, in which radical Islamic forces played a key factor.<sup>665</sup> Kulyabi leaders frequently utilised rhetoric that labelled their adversaries as 'Islamic fundamentalists', even though Islamists in Tajikistan did not, for the most part, agitate for a strict shari'a state or an Iranian-style theocracy. For example, as Safarov himself stated on two occasions:

*This is not a resurgence of Communism, we just wanted to be free of Islamic fundamentalism. Those people wanted the place to be a colony of Iran...*<sup>666</sup>

*We have stood up against Islamic fundamentalists in order to avoid the development of events following the Afghan example. We are in favour of creating an independent republic which will unite all nationalities.*<sup>667</sup>

According to Rubin and Kilavuz, pro-communist supporters referred to the Gharimi and Pamiri opposition as *Vofchiks*, a diminutive of Vladimir, slang for Wahhabi (there were no proper Wahhabis in Central Asia, but the term is often applied in the region to perceived fundamentalists). In turn, the opposition referred to government supporters as *Yurchiks*, short for Yuri, an allusion to the Russian-imposed and supported communist regime.<sup>668</sup> In short, despite the apparent commingling and peaceful relations amongst regional communities in the pre-war era, once conflict mobilisation was initiated along regional lines there were sufficient markers of difference to be deployed in the effort to demonise adversaries and thus stretch the norms related to civilian targeting.

Narratives of self-defence emerged as early as April 1992, when pro-communist demonstrators offered lofty rationales for their assemblage: they were there to 'defend truth, justice and democracy' and protect the republic from the illegal acts of the opposition, who were widely denounced as Islamic fundamentalists using unconstitutional means to set up an Islamic state.<sup>669</sup> Then-President Nabiev encouraged the self-defence narrative, for example in his speech declaring the formation of the National Guard (the PFT's precursor), in which he stated: 'What sort of government would it be if it could not protect itself?... I thank you for coming

<sup>665</sup> *The Independent*, 22/2/93; BBC/Multiple sources, 9/2/93.

<sup>666</sup> Quoted in *The Independent*, 22/2/93.

<sup>667</sup> Quoted in BBC World Service, 9/2/93.

<sup>668</sup> Rubin (1993), 78; Kilavuz (2007), 197.

<sup>669</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 4/5/92; BBC/Postfactum, 1/5/92; *The New York Times*, 4/5/92.

here and leaving behind your homes to protect the [parliamentary] session and me, the legally elected president... for gathering in the square for the sake of truth and justice'.<sup>670</sup> This defensive mandate facilitated the perspective amongst militia members that the opposition was an existential threat to the republic that must be stopped at any cost, thus weakening incentives for restraint in their use of violence. 'The homeland is in danger', Nabiev announced, invoking the ultimate threat and transferring the object of defence from himself alone to the entire nation.<sup>671</sup>

For Kulyabis, these narratives of demonisation and self-defence were seemingly confirmed by the victimisation perpetrated by the opposition once war broke out, including the blockade of Kulyab and the atrocities committed in Kurgan-Tyube. The latter were a key factor in the motivations of a number of PFT commanders, including Faisali Saidov:

*In mid-June 1992 he was in charge of a 10-strong self-defence unit of a sovkhos near Qurghonteppa. His 65-year-old father was arrested by the opposition at the city bazaar. Saidov immediately took 40 Gharmi peasants hostage and entered negotiations concerning his father's release, which he was ultimately promised. Having set the hostages free, he discovered his father's burnt and savagely mutilated corpse two days later. Saidov gathered his male family members, classmates and co-workers, and went to Kulob, where the now 200-strong formation was provided with arms.*<sup>672</sup>

As described in Chapter 3, Saidov became known as one of the most brutal perpetrators of atrocities against Gharmi and Pamiri populations, before dying in a shootout with Sangak Safarov. Colonel Khudoberdyev was also apparently motivated to join the PFT by atrocities committed against his family by opposition militants.<sup>673</sup> As the war and its attendant victimisation continued, moderate figures on both sides were eliminated in favour of more extreme and aggressive leaders (for example, Safarov himself killed Kulyab Chairman Rizoyev, who was apparently more conciliatory).<sup>674</sup> This further polarised the conflict actors and their populations, and helped fulfil demonisation projections.

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<sup>670</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 4/5/92.

<sup>671</sup> BBC/Multiple agencies, 8/5/92.

<sup>672</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 114. According to some accounts, Saidov's wife and children were also gruesomely murdered. Rubin (1993), 79.

<sup>673</sup> Bleuer (2007), 36.

<sup>674</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 190.

Such atrocities were particularly escalatory given the strong blood feud traditions in Tajikistan. As noted by Nourzhanov, the custom of 'blood feud...made the conflict even more ugly and uncontrollable'.<sup>675</sup> Tajik normative concepts such as *nomus* (honour) and *nang* (dignity) facilitated civilian victimisation and the escalation spiral by legitimising acts of vengeance against the perpetrators of atrocities; over time, 'revenge became an increasingly important reason for violence' among participants at all levels.<sup>676</sup> This motivation for violence was openly noted at the time; a Kulyab official noted that men in the region were taking their families away from the area and then returning 'to take revenge on the offenders'.<sup>677</sup>

Finally, there was one normative incentive that did not feature strongly for the PFT: the presence of a utopian ideology. Whilst the PFT broadly supported the restoration of the communist regime, they were not hard-line communists themselves. Their support for Nabiev and later Rahmonov was pragmatic, not ideological; it was the manifestation of patronage politics, not ideational suasion. To the extent there was a PFT ideology, it was of the reactionary variety: bitterly opposed to the political and religious reforms represented in the IRP platform, which they mischaracterised as Wahhabism and used to justify their narratives of self-defence. Thus, I argue that utopian ideology was a weak incentive for the PFT during the Tajik conflict.

In short, all but one of the normative incentives for victimisation were strongly present for the PFT during Phase I of the conflict. Their adversaries were successfully demonised thanks to a clear narrative of existential threat to Kulyabis, and notions of self-defence, justice and legitimatised vengeance all contributed to a process of norm-stretching that allowed perpetrators to bypass traditionally strong norms against civilian victimisation. This facilitated all of the victimisation behaviour that occurred during the first year of the war, from atrocities on the kolkhozy to ethnic cleansing and attacks on towns. In each case, the victims of such violence were somehow 'deserving' of their fate due to their membership in a hostile and threatening communal group.

Some of these elements continued to play a role in Phase II of the conflict. Whilst the Kulyabis had won the war, the continued guerrilla warfare practiced by the UTO maintained a narrative of Gharmi treachery and hostility and, thus, self-defence justifications. This, coupled with lingering revenge motivations, facilitated continued victimisation of displaced populations and

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<sup>675</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 113; Interview (Tajik war survivor), Dushanbe, 2008. See also: Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 14/10/92. Blood feud traditions were also mentioned as a factor in contemporary Tajikistan by a number of interviewees, for example (EU-BOMBAF), Dushanbe, 2008.

<sup>676</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 193; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>677</sup> BBC/Interfax, 2/7/92.

the perpetration of atrocities during government operations. However, because much of the PFT membership had become embedded in official structures, they were forced to at least appear more respectful of civilian protection norms, even if in practice the victimisation of Gharmi and Pamiri communities continued apace.

In sum, the normative incentives for victimisation can be characterised thusly:

| <b>Table 5.3. Normative Incentives for Victimisation</b> |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Norm-stretching                                          | Strong |
| Demonisation                                             | Strong |
| Self-defence Narrative                                   | Strong |
| Blood Feud Traditions                                    | Strong |
| Utopian Ideology                                         | Weak   |

### 5.3 Strategic Incentives for Restraint

Non-state forces typically face significant strategic incentives for restraint in intrastate warfare – in other words, incentives based on utility and self-interest in the pursuit of victory. Three of the most important are considered here: legitimacy; strategic discourse effects; and sustaining resources.

Lacking the resources available to state regimes, non-state forces usually require the support or at least the general passivity of the civilian population in order to engage in strategies of asymmetric warfare.<sup>678</sup> Attacks on civilians may undermine popular support, as the non-state force may acquire a reputation for brutality and untrustworthiness whilst also diminishing the perceived legitimacy of its cause.<sup>679</sup> A lack of legitimacy may not be crippling in the short term, as people tend to defer to threats of violence even if they do not agree with the actor's aims or strategies, but it can be counterproductive in the long run and remains a highly risky strategy, as a number of examples attest. The best known case is that of the Algerian Islamists, who alienated a previously supportive public by killing thousands of civilians in the early and mid-1990s, a key factor in their defeat. A more recent example is Al Qaeda in Iraq, whose atrocities were successful in sparking communitarian warfare but counterproductive in their enabling of tactical counter-alliances that nearly eliminated AQI. However, given the number of conflict actors who succeed despite victimising civilians and theoretically losing legitimacy, it would be

<sup>678</sup> Metz (2007), 6; O'Neill (1990), 70-85.

<sup>679</sup> Bangerter (2011), 358-63; Crenshaw (1990), 17.

wise not to overemphasise causal connections and outcomes in this regard. Non-state actors can find ways to compensate for any loss of legitimacy sustained as a result of targeting civilians. For example, Hezbollah has developed an extensive network of social services for its constituency, providing it with an alternative source of legitimacy that allows it to maintain support even if it engages in actions that do not receive universal approval. Even Pablo Escobar, one-time head of the Medellin cartel in Colombia and one of the world's foremost narco-traffickers, provided an array of social services in an attempt to garner some public support and legitimacy despite the thousands of deaths attributable to the cartels' war with the Colombian state.<sup>680</sup> Finally, even conflict actors with no apparent compensatory programmes can overcome a lack of legitimacy through their sheer brutality, as the case of Charles Taylor in Liberia attests.

Second, restraint may appear a more attractive option given its effects on the kind of strategic discourse that tends to emerge within intrastate wars. Targeting decisions are not made in a vacuum but rather are influenced strongly by the targeting decisions of the adversary, particularly in intrastate wars where the civilian population becomes a key centre of gravity.<sup>681</sup> Restraint can have positive effects on strategic discourse from the point of view of the non-state actor. First, it has the potential to incentivise the adversary – whether a state or non-state actor – to adhere to restraint in return, thus allowing the group to fulfil a protection function for its own constituency (with all the positive impact on legitimacy and political support that that entails).<sup>682</sup> In addition, restraint by the non-state force allows it to potentially benefit in terms of comparative legitimacy should the state actor victimise civilians itself (which is one of the reasons why non-state groups often try to provoke the state into using indiscriminate force amongst the population). Restraint may also attenuate popular support for the continuation of war-fighting by the state actor, whereas attacks on civilians may lead to popular pressure to continue fighting until the non-state force is eliminated. This may be seen in the case of Chechnya, for example, where earlier Russian reluctance to engage in drawn-out hostilities in the breakaway republic dissipated in the second Chechen conflict in part because of spectacular acts of terrorism and brutality on the part of Chechen Islamist militias.

Third, restraint towards civilians may lead to a more sustainable supply of resources for the non-state armed force. As usefully summarised by Wolf, 'insurgent movements can properly be considered as operating systems, requiring certain inputs from either local or foreign sources, which are organised and converted into the "outputs" characterising the active

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<sup>680</sup> Metz (2007), 17. See also Metelits (2010) on social services provided by the FARC, the PKK and the SPLA.

<sup>681</sup> Kalyvas (2006).

<sup>682</sup> Slim (2007), 280.

insurgency. In general, insurgency requires inputs of recruits, information, shelter and food from the local environment'.<sup>683</sup> Civilian victimisation interferes with the production of all four of these inputs: civilians are either unable or unwilling to provide such goods if they have been displaced, killed, injured or rendered fundamentally hostile. Whilst coercion often proves necessary in the acquisition of resources (as described below) the use of persuasive measures rather than violence is likely to ensure less disruption of the necessary inputs.<sup>684</sup>

However, the Tajik case study serves as a useful example as to how such incentives may be weak within certain strategic environments. First, the Tajik civil war did not feature a conventional state actor during its most intense phase. This had a significant impact on both the competition for legitimacy and the dynamics of the strategic discourse. The PFT confronted non-state adversaries as seemingly hobbled as itself in terms of legitimacy, capacity and popular support. Whereas non-state forces usually attempt to compensate for their weakness vis-à-vis state forces by garnering greater credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies and gradually increasing their ability to protect them, the PFT did not have the usual asymmetrical conundrum. It faced militias equally as weak in the early months of the war, and then gained in strength thanks to Uzbek and Russian support and its eventual incorporation into the regime after its victory in Dushanbe. Thus, it did not see the usual benefits in restraint that many non-state forces would.

Second, all of the war-fighting militias had more or less 'captive' constituencies – e.g., the PFT and the Kulyabis, the IRP and the Gharmis – which meant that restraint was unlikely to yield any of the benefits in legitimacy and popular support posited by theories based in more politicised internal conflicts.<sup>685</sup> For example, it was unlikely that a Gharmi kolkhoz would choose to support a more restrained PFT militia over a more brutal IRP militia, as their best hope of survival was an IRP militia regardless of its level of brutality.

Third, the normative aspects previously cited – such as demonisation and blood feud traditions – combined with the unique strategic environment of the Tajik war created ideal conditions for the 'socialisation of barbarism'.<sup>686</sup> With a predominance of non-state conflict actors operating outside the boundaries of the laws of war and international sanction, and a target field largely lacking in non-civilian targets, the potential for reciprocity of restraint was low. Instead, an escalatory cycle of atrocities emerged, as indicated by the exponential rise in casualty

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<sup>683</sup> Wolf (1965), 10.

<sup>684</sup> Bangerter (2011), 362-63.

<sup>685</sup> Kalyvas (2006); US Army (2006).

<sup>686</sup> Borrowing from Kenneth Waltz's argument on socialisation, i.e., that 'competition produces a tendency toward the sameness of the competitors'. Waltz (1979), 127. See also: Phillips (1990), 190; Kriesberg (2007), 162.



estimates and engineered migrations throughout 1992 and early 1993.

Finally, whilst civilian victimisation did indeed interfere with the supply of resources – as shown by the Kulyabis’ desperate need for food following the war of the kolkhozy – in the near-anarchic conditions of the war, victimisation was also a key mechanism for *obtaining* resources. Civilians were forced to join militias, tortured for information, and their homes and food seized by force. In the context of an evaporating national political order and competition with other non-state militias, the highly criminalised PFT militias were unlikely to favour more time-consuming persuasive methods over coercion.

In short, the strategic incentives for restraint were weak during Phase I of the conflict, due to the unusual features of the Tajik strategic environment. However, these incentives were comparatively stronger during Phase II of the conflict, when PFT actors became largely embedded within official structures and diplomatic mechanisms. As the strategic discourse shifted to a more typical state/non-state format (i.e., the Tajik regime vs. the UTO), legitimacy became a more important factor to the regime; as diplomats brokered one ceasefire after another, reciprocity became a more viable concept within the discourse. The devastated state of the Tajik economy and agricultural sector also made a compelling case for restoring instead of destroying rural livelihoods. However, the relatively stronger incentives for restraint in Phase II should not obscure the continuing and large-scale victimisation of civilians, as described in Chapter 4. Evidently, strategic restraint was not strong enough to overcome the multivariate incentives for victimisation.

| <b>Table 5.4. Strategic Incentives for Restraint</b> |                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Legitimacy                                           | Weak in Phase I / Moderate in Phase II |
| Strategic discourse effects                          | Weak in Phase I / Moderate in Phase II |
| Resource sustainability                              | Weak in Phase I / Moderate in Phase II |

## 5.4 Strategic Incentives for Victimisation

The strategic incentives to target civilians may be the most powerful group of incentives considered here, for the simple reason that they encompass those factors that are perceived to help non-state forces achieve their aims. Non-state forces are often militarily weak and

forced to utilise asymmetric strategies of warfare. This creates a set of strategic incentives for civilian victimisation.<sup>687</sup>

First, a militarily weak non-state force may find it prohibitively difficult to attack well-protected government or military targets with any degree of consistency or success.<sup>688</sup> Should this be the case, there is a greater incentive to attack softer and more vulnerable targets, namely civilians. This allows a non-state force to maintain its war-fighting status at a lower short-term cost, both in terms of funding and manpower. In some cases, violence is barely necessary at all – the mere fear of what might transpire is enough to provoke mass flight. Given that non-state armed groups tend to operate under serious financial constraints, the cheaper tactics of victimisation – especially compared with the cost-intensive mechanisms of a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy – are attractive.<sup>689</sup>

Second, non-state forces will often seek to prolong the conflict – either to maximise the time available to attain significant military strength, or to gradually wear down the opponent’s political will to continue fighting.<sup>690</sup> For a militarily weak force, attrition is one of the few strategic options available, and targeting civilians may be the only means of keeping the conflict alive. The potential counterproductive effects of attacking civilians are overridden by the need to keep fighting – if the non-state force is unable to sustain the conflict, then any long-term impact of civilian targeting is largely irrelevant.

In some cases, it appears increasingly evident that some non-state forces actually do not seek victory or an end to conflict but rather a sustained level of violence and disorder in order to maintain local autonomy and/or pursue illicit activities. Le Billon notes the existence of ‘aggressive-symbiotic relationships’ between governments and rebels in a number of conflicts, where ‘opposing parties may have an interest in prolonging a profitable military stalemate in order to preserve economic interests that could be threatened by a total victory and subsequent peace’.<sup>691</sup> In essence, the development of a profitable war economy creates incentives amongst its participants to perpetuate it, even at the expense of the wellbeing of the population and the state as a whole.<sup>692</sup> Thus, stalemate – not only victory – can also be an

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<sup>687</sup> Crenshaw (1990), 11. The fact that militarily weak actors pursue certain strategies does not obviate the use of the same strategies by state actors; victimisation, for example, is often a lower-cost option for strong state actors. Greenhill (2008), 11.

<sup>688</sup> This dynamic is particularly evident in the case of international military interventions, where foreign military forces and political actors are typically sheltered in inaccessible bases (such as the Green Zone in Baghdad) and exercise high standards of force protection, leaving insurgents with mostly civilian targets to choose from.

<sup>689</sup> Greenhill (2008), 17.

<sup>690</sup> Kilcullen (2009), 31-32.

<sup>691</sup> Le Billon (2001), 572.

<sup>692</sup> Keen (2000), 24-31; Wennmann (2011), 346; Kaldor (2007), 95; Mueller (2004), 115; Kalyvas (2006), 58.

incentive for victimisation, as prolonging this type of intrastate conflict indefinitely will inevitably require predatory treatment of civilians.

Third, a non-state force might seek the active support of the population – but if it cannot attain this, it will often settle for at least popular passivity or neutrality. If it cannot win the people over through its political or ideological efforts, it may resort to violence against them to prevent them from aiding the adversary or otherwise undermining its war-fighting efforts.<sup>693</sup> This incentive is a key driver of atrocities in warfare, including mass rape and mutilation/beheading, as a small armed force can pacify a large population via public and horrific acts of violence (as seen in the conflicts in the Balkans and West Africa, as well as the current drug war in Mexico).<sup>694</sup> The aim is not to eliminate all civilians, but rather to victimise a sufficient number that the rest of the population submits to the non-state actor's control.<sup>695</sup>

Fourth, non-state forces may decide that the best way to acquire territory and resources is to kill, displace and rob civilians in large-scale victimisation campaigns. This may be a particularly attractive option for weaker forces who cannot engage state forces directly, or who see the lower cost of civilian victimisation as desirable due to limited resources. The Balkan wars of the 1990s demonstrate the relative ease with which small paramilitary forces can put rival populations to flight and claim their territory: for example, the attacks and predations of the 'White Eagles', a Serbian gang in the Visegrad region of Bosnia, spurred the flight of around 14,000 Bosnian Muslims despite a membership of only fifteen or so.<sup>696</sup> As noted by Greenhill, refugee flows are often 'strategically engineered' and rational choices – in other words, not incidental effects of armed violence but intentionally organised phenomena intended to aid the pursuit of military or political aims.<sup>697</sup> Finally, an interesting tangent to the acquisition incentive has arisen in recent decades due to the expansion and institutionalisation of international relief efforts. As argued by Polman, the exponential increases in attention and funding that derive from the perpetration of atrocities may serve as an incentive to commit them in the first place.<sup>698</sup> For example, charity programmes intended to free slaves in Sudan by buying their freedom had the perverse effect of incentivising 'slavers' to take more captives.<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> O'Neill (1990), 84-85; Kalyvas (2006), 92-105; Wolf (1965), 10; Kilcullen (2009), 30-31; Bangerter (2011), 373-74.

<sup>694</sup> Yanacopulos and Hanlon (2006), 29; Kaldor (2007), 105; Physicians for Human Rights (2002). On the use of 'corpse messaging' in the Mexican drug war, see *The New Yorker* (Finnegan), 31/5/10. See also Giustozzi (2008), Chapters 2 and 4, on the Taliban's successful use of targeted killings of 'collaborators', government officials, village elders and mullahs.

<sup>695</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 26.

<sup>696</sup> Semelin (2005), 243. See also: Kaldor (2007), 54; Hultman (2010), 32-33.

<sup>697</sup> Greenhill (2008), 13.

<sup>698</sup> Polman (2010). See also Greenhill (2008) on the use of refugees to solicit international support.

<sup>699</sup> *The New Yorker* (Gourevitch), 11/10/10, 105.

It is clear from the case study that the PFT saw significant strategic incentives for victimisation during Phase I of the war. In the earliest months, their small numbers and overall weakness meant that civilian targets were realistically the only targets they could pursue with any hope of success. The 'war of the kolkhozy' in the summer of 1992 was largely the result of militia weakness on both sides, with the lightly defended and open kolkhozy providing tempting targets. It was not until the PFT acquired larger numbers and better weaponry that they advanced to attacking larger population centres, including the capital. Following their victory, they continued to target refugees and other civilians. As noted in Chapter 4, low rates of gun ownership amongst Tajik civilians increased their vulnerability to predatory conflict actors.

It would not necessarily be accurate to say that the PFT attacked civilians to *prolong* the conflict, but at least in the early days victimisation was a way for local militias to *enter* the conflict and acquire enough resources and territory to maintain a war-fighting existence. It appears unlikely, however, that the PFT sought a long-running state of disorder. Especially once their capabilities improved, they were clearly eager to end the war with victory in Dushanbe, as shown by their premature coup attempt in October 1992. Le Billon's argument still bears some relevance for the conflict overall, however – as noted in Chapter 4, many believed at the time that the civil war was being prolonged for the benefit of the Tajik narco-trafficking industry.

PFT strategies did not require popular support outside their home constituency of Kulyab, but they did depend on popular passivity. In this, they were aided by what was seen at the time as a tendency toward passivity within the Tajik population generally. Davlat Khudonazarov explained, 'At the moment society is asleep...The social system is still feudalistic. In the past, people got used to obeying first the local landlord, after that the chairman of the collective farm, then the secretary of the Communist Party. Now they obey the man with the gun'.<sup>700</sup> This served the PFT well. They were not a classical insurgent force, vying to overturn a regime on the basis of a preferable socio-political programme. They were operating within a strategic environment in which the non-state force that controlled the capital and a few key population centres – by force if necessary – could claim control of the state. During Phase I, the civilian population was a key centre of gravity because of the competition for territorial control and resources, not for the 'hearts and minds' of a COIN campaign. The conflict was being driven by paramilitary forces, not the public at large. Even Sangak Safarov, in his own slightly unhinged

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<sup>700</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 30/9/92.

way, believed that 'to end the civil war in Tajikistan, it would be enough to shoot dead four leaders on each warring side. "I am ready to become one of these four," he stressed'.<sup>701</sup>

This particular incentive for victimisation helps explain the weakness of legitimacy incentives for restraint. Once the PFT had eliminated its opponents within Kulyab – their first order of business – they essentially gained legitimacy within their own constituency by virtue of being seen as the sole protectors of the community in the face of Gharmi and Pamiri aggression (e.g., the blockade of Kulyab). They did not have an incentive to try to gain legitimacy amongst other constituencies, not only because they were unlikely to do so in any event, but because their strategic needs did not include widespread popular support. They aimed to maintain themselves and eventually succeed through a combination of forcible acquisition, criminal proceeds and covert support from Uzbek and Russian actors. Thus, their main requirement as far as the civilian population was passivity, and victimisation proved a useful way of acquiring it.

Finally, possibly the largest strategic incentive for victimisation by the PFT was its utility in the acquisition of territorial control and resources. During the early months of the war the PFT found the means to support its militias through attacks on kolkhozy, and later on population centres like Kurgan-Tyube and Kolkhozabad. Kulyabi militias managed to take control of southern and southwestern Tajikistan not only by defeating IRP militias, but by putting hundreds of thousands of civilians to flight. Following victory in Dushanbe, ethnic cleansing helped consolidate control of the capital and served to reward paramilitary fighters. Attacks on resettled refugees helped Kulyabis hold onto the land and possessions they had claimed during the fighting. In short, the terms of competition and conflict during Phase I of the civil war encouraged strategies based on the physical control of territory and the resources necessary to survive, and the relative military weakness of the conflict actors made victimisation appear the most likely means of success.

In sum, strategic incentives for victimisation by the PFT were very strong during Phase I of the civil war. These incentives shifted somewhat during Phase II, however, due to the changed strategic environment and shifting role of PFT members. Victimisation remained attractive due to the vulnerability of civilian targets – especially refugees – to violence, whether for criminal or strategic purposes. It was no longer seen as useful, however, for entering or maintaining a presence in the conflict, as the PFT's victory and incorporation into official structures had taken care of such needs. Victimisation continued to be useful for maintaining popular

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<sup>701</sup> BBC/*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 6/10/92.

passivity, which reduced potential opposition to the regime and facilitated the predatory exploitation of civilians by narco-traffickers and other criminal elements. Finally, there was still a need to acquire control over territory and resources – only now in the eastern half of Tajikistan, as government offensives targeted UTO bases and militias. In this case, however, civilian victimisation was not so much the primary means of acquisition as it was a predictable outcome of the manner in which the regime conducted its military operations in the region.

In sum, the strategic incentives for victimisation can be represented thusly:

| <b>Table 5.5. Strategic Incentives for Victimisation</b> |                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Softer targets                                           | Strong in Phase I / Strong in Phase II   |
| Enter/prolong conflict                                   | Strong in Phase I / Weak in Phase II     |
| Popular passivity                                        | Strong in Phase I / Strong in Phase II   |
| Territory and resource acquisition                       | Strong in Phase I / Moderate in Phase II |

## 5.5 Criminal Incentives for Restraint

At first glance, the idea that criminally motivated groups – virtually defined by their predatory behaviour – would engage in restraint toward civilians appears illogical. However, non-state armed forces do face several incentives for restraint derived from their criminal activities. These incentives exist because of the nature of the *war economy*, or the shift of a state's economic activities during conflict to encompass a range of licit and illicit markets and behaviour. Under this conceptualisation, criminal groups are not external and illegitimate actors preying upon a state's economy and citizens, but key players in a transformed economic sphere in which 'criminal' activity becomes more widely dispersed throughout society.<sup>702</sup> Coercion and violence are still key aspects of criminality, but the greater scope of illicit markets and transactions requires conflict actors engaged in criminality – which in intrastate wars tends to be most actors – to consider new incentive structures with respect to their use of violence against civilians.

In essence, viewing criminality – and especially criminality during warfare – as simply predation would obviate the possibility of criminal incentives for restraint. The value of the political economy of conflict approach is that it allows a more nuanced perspective on the incentives for criminality in conflict, and thus reveals that criminal actors in warfare are not monolithically

<sup>702</sup> See Goodhand (2004) for a useful war economy typology.

or consistently predatory. Two key incentives for restraint are the dynamics of the protection industry during conflict, and the sustainability requirements of criminal enterprises.

First, whilst the literature on civilian victimisation notes that non-state armed groups may achieve legitimacy and popular support by protecting civilians from violence perpetrated by the state or other non-state actors, empirical evidence suggests that a leading source of funding for non-state groups is in fact payments for protection by civilians (including civilians engaged in illicit activity, such as narco-trafficking).<sup>703</sup> In other words, non-state groups are not necessarily providing protection to civilians for normative or strategic reasons, but as part of a criminal racket designed to fund the group's activities.<sup>704</sup> The Taliban, for example, profit from the Afghan drugs trade not by being directly involved in production and trade but by providing protection to (as well as taxing) farmers and traffickers.<sup>705</sup> Some non-state armed groups actually emerge from the protection business: the AUC, a right-wing paramilitary force in Colombia that became heavily involved in the drugs trade, was initially established as a protection force for large landowners. The privatisation of the security function thus provides an incentive for restraint toward those civilians participating in the market for protection provision.<sup>706</sup>

Second, non-state forces engaged in any form of criminal activity require sustainable economic inputs of various kinds to participate in that activity, most of which would suffer if undue civilian victimisation were to occur.<sup>707</sup> Narco-traffickers require civilians to grow and harvest drug crops and undertake low-level smuggling activity. Black markets require suppliers and customers. The highly profitable kidnapping industry that exists in many conflict zones would dry up if all of its victims were killed instead of released.<sup>708</sup> Extortion rackets at roadblocks – another key source of funding – would suffer if victimisation became so severe that people avoided the area completely. Whilst coercion can be a strong factor in civilian participation in illicit activity, many civilians participate willingly as producers and consumers of criminal goods and services. With this in mind, general market dynamics should generate some consideration of restraint amongst non-state armed groups that depend upon criminal sources of funding to survive. According to the UNODC, 'Professional criminals may seek to minimize the extent of

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<sup>703</sup> The discussion of criminal incentives draws heavily upon the author's research for two UK Ministry of Defence reports (2010, 2011) on criminality and stabilisation operations (restricted access).

<sup>704</sup> McMullin (2009), 85-86; Keen (2000), 29.

<sup>705</sup> Interview (EUPOL), Kabul, 2008. Protection has been a key activity for the Taliban since its earliest days, when it established protection rackets for the cross-border trucking industry. Felbab-Brown (2006).

<sup>706</sup> This incentive does not hold true, however, where non-state groups are coercing civilians to pay for protection, which in itself is a form of victimisation.

<sup>707</sup> Wolf (1965).

<sup>708</sup> See Grayson (2011), 6-8, on the range of severity in kidnappings in Mexico, where kidnapping is the second-highest source of criminal income after drug sales.

violence to ensure the smooth flow of profits and to avoid unwanted attention...Typically, the better organized the crime, the less violence associated with it'.<sup>709</sup>

In short, the emergence of a war economy and its associated structures and market dynamics creates a set of incentives for non-state conflict actors engaged in criminality to limit their predation upon the civilian population. Put simply, civilians are not just a target to be exploited or robbed, but a valuable economic input in the production of illicit goods and services.

Criminal incentives are quite salient in considering the PFT, a militia largely comprising criminals which persistently engaged in illicit activity to fund its activities and generate personal wealth, even after its official disbandment. To a certain extent, the PFT did engage in restraint toward its own constituency (the Kulyabis). In the anarchic environment of the Tajik civil war, with the security function highly privatised, protection was a key element of the PFT's legitimacy and support. During the war of the kolkhozy, PFT militias protected Kulyabis in Kurgan-Tyube whilst attacking and robbing Gharmis and Pamiris. During Phase II, Gharmis and Pamiris, not Kulyabis, were targeted for extortion and coercion (for example at roadblocks) by former PFT members now in the security services. High-ranking former PFT leaders in the government offered protection for Kulyabis involved in narco-trafficking (much as former UTO leaders protected the trade in eastern Tajikistan).<sup>710</sup> In short, the strategic environment of the conflict generated both the need for a privatised protection function as well as obvious lines of communal demarcation that made it easy for a group like the PFT to locate a constituency to protect. Thus, I argue that the PFT had a strong criminal incentive to engage in restraint, due to the protection element.

With regard to the second incentive, I argue that consideration of the sustainability of illicit activity was relatively low during Phase I of the conflict. At this time, both the PFT and the IRP were in desperate need of resources, either for themselves or their suffering constituencies. They looted towns and farms, coerced civilians into the drugs trade, and exploited and stole from refugees. The sheer scale of brutality and destruction does not suggest any concern for possible over-predation. However, following the PFT victory in Dushanbe and its incorporation into official structures, there appeared to be a gradual consolidation of corrupt and criminal actors that encouraged more formal arrangements and a greater concern for sustainability. In the drugs trade, larger and more structured networks emerged, with a fairly high level of cooperation amongst them that reduced incentives for collateral violence. In the security

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<sup>709</sup> UNODC (2010), 34.

<sup>710</sup> Nourzhanov (2005).



services, the removal of Salimov and purging of the Interior Ministry helped reduce lawlessness and funnel corrupt behaviour into more predictable channels (e.g., bribe-seeking). In general, former PFT members who joined the government were now able to preside over extensive patronage and criminal networks that privileged less violent methods of coercion for their maintenance. However, this should not obscure the continued high levels of criminal violence against civilians, compared to the pre-war era.

In sum, the criminal incentives for restraint can be represented thusly:

| <b>Table 5.6. Criminal Incentives for Restraint</b> |                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Protection market                                   | Strong                                 |
| Sustainable economic inputs                         | Weak in Phase I / Moderate in Phase II |

## 5.6 Criminal Incentives for Victimisation

Despite the potential incentives for sparing civilians from victimisation for business purposes, there is no denying that non-state armed groups face strong incentives for civilian victimisation via participation in criminal activity. The types of organised crime that non-state armed groups are most likely to engage in – drugs and arms trafficking, natural resource exploitation, extortion and protection rackets, sex trafficking, kidnapping for ransom – all involve substantial and predictable harm to civilian populations.<sup>711</sup> Thus, the decision by an armed group to engage in criminal activity is inherently a decision to engage in civilian victimisation. The criminal incentives for victimisation can perhaps best be summarised as, first, acquisition, and second, status and control.

First, the fundamental incentive to engage in criminality – and thus criminal victimisation – is the acquisition of resources and profit. Regardless of whether a non-state actor's purpose in engaging in criminality is to fund its war-making activities or to generate personal wealth, the basic aim of criminal behaviour is the acquisition of wealth, which generally requires the use or threat of use of violence, including against the civilian population. Criminal acquisition is a powerful incentive for non-state armed groups because typically, in modern conflicts, the usual sources of productive economic activity within a country have either been shut down or become the object of contestation amongst conflict actors.<sup>712</sup> This leaves non-state groups with few other options, particularly if external assistance is not significant and they are forced

<sup>711</sup> UNODC (2010), 34; Wennmann (2011), 337.

<sup>712</sup> Kaldor (2007), 108-9.

to self-finance.<sup>713</sup> Two of the most common coping strategies are direct predation upon the civilian population (looting, robbing, kidnapping, appropriating homes and land) and taxation of licit and illicit activities within the war economy, such as by setting up checkpoint extortion rackets, taxing humanitarian aid deliveries, and taking a cut of lootable resource revenues.<sup>714</sup>

Criminal acquisition becomes an even more powerful incentive when conflated with strategic incentives for the acquisition of territory and resources – i.e., when there is a strategic rationale for attacking and robbing civilians – and normative incentives such as demonisation. All of these variables come together in ethnic cleansing operations, for example.<sup>715</sup> In addition, successful criminal acquisition by a non-state force may encourage victimisation by allowing the group to forego the need for popular support. The political economy of conflict literature reveals that conflicts sustained by the illicit trade in lootable resources (such as drug crops and alluvial diamonds), ‘appear to be associated with increased predation of civilians by armed groups in the form of forced labour, extortion, pillaging and looting, as control over lootable natural resources relieves combatants of the need to generate and maintain social capital among putative supporters’.<sup>716</sup>

Second, as an actor in the organised crime market, a non-state armed force must maintain certain levels of influence and status, and control a defined criminal space (in the sense of territory, membership and/or networks). Thus, some violence against civilians will be motivated not by acquisition but by the need to reinforce the actor’s criminal position. For example, civilians who refuse to participate in drugs production may be killed as a message to other farmers. The families of rivals may be targeted to induce their withdrawal from the market. Non-state actors may try to create ‘no-go’ areas for state actors via high levels of civilian victimisation, in order to control political and economic activity in a given territory. In short, the desire on the part of a non-state actor to maintain its position in criminal markets and avoid government counter-strategies functions as a criminal incentive that leads to civilian victimisation.

Again, criminal incentives are highly relevant for the PFT, which functioned essentially as a criminal militia during Phase I, and as a criminal network within official structures during Phase II. (As Chapter 4 described in detail the processes and aims of PFT criminality during the civil war, this incentive will be only briefly summarised here.) Throughout the war, the PFT was

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<sup>713</sup> Wennmann (2011), 341.

<sup>714</sup> Keen (2000), 29-31.

<sup>715</sup> See, for example, Semelin (2005), 242-43.

<sup>716</sup> Ballentine and Nitzschke (2003), 15.

highly motivated by criminal acquisition, both to fund its activities and to generate personal wealth. Towns and kolkhozy were targeted not just for strategic reasons, and not just out of normative hatred, but because they contained lootable goods that ad hoc PFT militias could appropriate. The defeated Gharimi and Pamiri populations were targeted for predation due to their vulnerability and the high likelihood of successfully victimising them with impunity. Overall levels of poverty and devastation helped boost the strength of criminal incentives, as illicit activity became one of the only ways ordinary Tajiks could survive.

Second, there are also some indications of civilian victimisation in order to maintain status and control of criminal markets. PFT leaders who assumed local positions, such as Ibodullo Boimatov in Tursunzade, fought turf battles with rivals in which civilians were killed. Former PFT ministers in Dushanbe allowed their underlings, especially in the security forces, to victimise civilians as a way of gaining the loyalty of the ranks and increasing their political power. However, the general covert nature of this type of victimisation dictates that little firm evidence of its occurrence can be found. Thus, whilst I presume this incentive existed for the PFT, given its frequent occurrence amongst criminal actors, it cannot be analysed with significant clarity.

In short, given the strategic environment of the war and the nature of the PFT, there was little likelihood that criminal incentives for victimisation would be weak. Many PFT members were criminals before the war and the anarchic conditions of the conflict only removed further what constraints had existed on their pursuit of ill-gotten gains. The primary effect of the war upon already existing criminal incentives was to strengthen them, due to increased opportunities and impunity as well as new strategic and normative rationales for victimisation.

In sum, the criminal incentives for victimisation can be represented thusly:

| <b>Table 5.7. Criminal Incentives for Victimisation</b> |                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Acquisition                                             | Strong                 |
| Status and control                                      | Presumed but uncertain |

The consideration of criminal incentives further strengthens the case for considering non-state armed forces as conflict actors, rather than attempting to separate them into political and criminal spheres. The overlap of incentives such as acquisition, protection, and sustainable

resources across both the strategic and criminal categories of incentives demonstrates the difficulty in teasing out the drivers of non-state actor behaviour.

## 5.7 Conclusion: Considering the Incentives Mix

Having examined each category of incentives in turn, it is now possible to aggregate the key variables and consider the ways in which they might interact for a singular conflict actor. The process of interaction is key: it would be rare for one set of incentives to be the sole and definitive driver of a decision to target civilians. I argue that it is more likely that a number of variables combine synergistically to encourage victimisation, and that this choice is further determined by the strength or weakness of the variables that encourage restraint. The strength of the binary, multivariate incentives model is that it allows a more holistic consideration of the drivers of targeting behaviour, which I believe is preferable to trying to find a singular linear cause of what in the end is amongst the most complex of human choices.

The full array of incentives is captured in Table 5.8:

| <b>Table 5.8. Non-State Actor Incentives Model: Restraint vs. Victimisation</b> |                      |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Category of Incentives</b>                                                   | <b>Binary Choice</b> | <b>Main Variables</b>                                                                                        |
| Normative                                                                       | Restraint            | International humanitarian law<br>NSA Codes of Conduct<br>Societal norms                                     |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Norm-stretching<br>Demonisation<br>Defensive threat perceptions<br>Blood feud traditions<br>Utopian ideology |
| Strategic                                                                       | Restraint            | Legitimacy<br>Strategic discourse effects<br>Sustaining resources                                            |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Soft targets<br>Prolonging conflict<br>Passivity of civilians<br>Territory and resource acquisition          |
| Criminal                                                                        | Restraint            | Protection function<br>Economic inputs                                                                       |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Asset acquisition<br>Status and control                                                                      |

Considering these incentives in a generic fashion, it appears that typically the normative incentives for restraint in intrastate war are extremely weak. The strategic incentives for restraint should be weightier, but may be overcome by either the normative incentives for victimisation (for example, if demonisation obscures the likelihood of negative strategic effects) or the strategic incentives for victimisation (such as when the need to stay relevant in a conflict overrides any concerns about sustainable resourcing). Even if the normative and/or strategic incentives for restraint are relatively strong, criminal incentives – particularly the need to acquire resources and funding – may override them and generate victimisation.

In short, the normative, strategic and criminal incentives for civilian victimisation are relatively strong for non-state actors in intrastate warfare. They may yet be deterred by the threat of reprisals or intervention, but absent a strong response from the adversary, victimisation presents the possibility of positive outcomes for a non-state armed force.

Viewing the Tajik case through the prism of this incentives model illustrates the interdependence of the variables considered here, as shown in Table 5.9:

| Table 5.9. Non-State Actor Incentives Model for the Tajik Civil War Case Study |               |                                    |                                                  |                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Category of Incentives                                                         | Binary Choice | Main Variables                     | Strength: Phase I                                | Strength: Phase II                               |
| Normative                                                                      | Restraint     | International humanitarian law     | Weak                                             | Weak                                             |
|                                                                                |               | NSA Codes of Conduct               | Weak                                             | Weak                                             |
|                                                                                |               | Societal norms                     | Strong but overridden by Normative-Victimisation | Strong but overridden by Normative-Victimisation |
|                                                                                | Victimisation | Norm-stretching                    | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
|                                                                                |               | Demonisation                       | Strong                                           | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                |               | Self-defence narratives            | Strong                                           | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                |               | Blood feud traditions              | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
|                                                                                |               | Utopian ideology                   | Weak                                             | Weak                                             |
|                                                                                | Restraint     | Legitimacy                         | Weak                                             | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                |               | Strategic discourse effects        | Weak                                             | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                |               | Resource sustainability            | Weak                                             | Moderate                                         |
| Strategic                                                                      | Victimisation | Soft targets                       | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
|                                                                                |               | Prolonging conflict                | Strong                                           | Weak                                             |
|                                                                                |               | Passivity of civilians             | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
|                                                                                |               | Territory and resource acquisition | Strong                                           | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                | Restraint     | Protection function                | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
|                                                                                |               | Economic inputs                    | Weak                                             | Moderate                                         |
|                                                                                |               | Asset acquisition                  | Strong                                           | Strong                                           |
| Criminal                                                                       | Victimisation | Status and control                 | Presumed but uncertain                           | Presumed but uncertain                           |

During Phase I of the civil war, all of the restraint incentives were weak, except for Societal Norms (which were overridden by the normative incentives for victimisation) and the Protection Function (which could co-exist with victimisation, as captive constituencies allowed the PFT to protect their own whilst victimising rival communities). Conversely, the incentives

for victimisation during Phase I were very strong. As discussed, the relative strength and weakness of the incentives was due to the strategic environment of intrastate war in combination with the unique aspects of the Tajik conflict in its first year and the nature of the PFT.

During Phase II, the strategic incentives for restraint grew in strength whilst the normative and strategic incentives for victimisation diminished somewhat. I argue that this helps account for the general lessening in intensity of victimisation during Phase II – whilst civilian suffering was still widespread, fewer people were killed and displaced populations were gradually allowed to return. Nevertheless, the incentives for victimisation still outweighed those for restraint.

Thus, consideration of the full array of incentives and their interactions suggests possible answers to some of the more perplexing questions with respect to victimisation during the Tajik civil war. Why did societal norms not protect innocent civilians from being targeted? I argue that these were overcome by the strength of all the incentives for victimisation, and in particular those normative processes that allowed perpetrators to ‘stretch’ societal norms and rationalise their violations of them. Why did victimisation continue during Phase II, after the PFT had essentially won the war? I argue that the criminal incentives for victimisation, combined with still-strong normative and strategic incentives and still-weak restraint incentives, led the Kulyabi faction to continue to see benefits in victimising civilians.

In short, I argue that this incentives approach provides the most comprehensive answers to the second element of the research question: why did the PFT target civilians? By considering this decision through the binary choices of restraint or victimisation, and examining a full array of possible drivers, it becomes possible to argue that victimisation was 1) largely a product of its apparent attractiveness to the PFT in fulfilling its political and criminal aims; and 2) facilitated by normative mechanisms that provided justifying rationales for behaviour that would otherwise be seen as transgressive. In other words, the PFT saw victimisation as a useful vehicle for sustaining its wartime activities, defeating its conflict adversaries, and enriching its members – and was able to overcome the taboos against its behaviour by constructing legitimising narratives and invoking retaliatory traditions. Finally, the incentives model helps clarify that some drivers traditionally associated with victimisation – such as utopian ideologies – were not a factor in PFT victimisation.

Having addressed the second element of the research question, I now turn to the third: what were the short-term effects of victimisation? The next chapter examines the impact of civilian victimisation on the conflict dynamics of the Tajik civil war.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE IMPACT OF CIVILIAN VICTIMISATION ON THE CONFLICT DYNAMICS OF THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR

This chapter comprises the fourth step in this dissertation's research approach: an examination of the impact of civilian victimisation by the PFT on the conflict dynamics of the Tajik civil war. In terms of the strategic approach, this chapter's aim is to highlight the *strategic outcomes* of the PFT's decision to engage in civilian victimisation instead of restraint.

A close reading of the Tajik case study yields five aspects of the conflict that were significantly affected by civilian victimisation by the PFT: military operations and strategy; escalation and resolution of conflict; dispersion of violence; territory and resource acquisition; and legitimacy. This chapter examines each of these in turn. Each section differentiates the impact of different types of victimisation (as presented in Chapter 4) whilst also considering their evolution over time. The chapter ends with a summary of the strategic outcomes related to victimisation, and an evaluation of whether civilian victimisation was beneficial or counterproductive for the PFT overall.

#### 6.1 Military Strategies and Operations

The decision to engage in civilian victimisation will fundamentally determine the types of strategies and kinetic operations that non-state forces can pursue. Removing considerations of restraint opens up the target field immeasurably and allows combatants to use force without the obstacles imposed by the need for distinction. Violence can be geographically dispersed far more widely, as targets are not limited to fixed official and military installations but may include large segments of the population. Non-state forces may acquire control over large swathes of territory that could never be occupied via conventional military attacks, giving them resources and sanctuary that allow them to utilise increasingly conventional forms of warfare. Indiscriminate violence also tends to generate large flows of refugees, who can become key strategic players in their own right. Finally, as described in detail earlier, the decision to engage in victimisation by a conflict actor will become a key element of the

conflict's strategic discourse. In short, the military aspects of the conflict represent the most obvious area in which civilian victimisation will have an impact.<sup>717</sup>

The strategic advantages of civilian victimisation for non-state armed groups tend to make it a key element of their war-fighting strategies. Civilian victimisation is not just a by-product but a primary expression of their violence. This was the case for the Popular Front of Tajikistan. Always an extremely devolved group of actors, it is difficult to speak of a unified war-fighting strategy for the PFT – even its top two leaders, Safarov and Kenjaev, disagreed over targets and timing. Yet overall, PFT militias clearly incorporated civilian victimisation into their instrumental pursuit of violence. Whether attacking rival kolkhozy, shelling cities or provoking the flight of refugees, nearly all of the methods with which the PFT decided to pursue its aims included some form of civilian victimisation.

This section considers five aspects of military strategy and operations that were significantly affected by civilian victimisation by the PFT: targeting dynamics; war-fighting methods; adversary resources; dissension; and strategic discourse.

First, civilian victimisation helped establish the targeting dynamics of the conflict, by contributing to the polarisation of the conflict into regional, not political, blocs.<sup>718</sup> Civilian victimisation targeted at specific communities early in the conflict transformed the political confrontation in Dushanbe into a war based in social, historical, and perhaps more visceral factors:

*One informant stated: 'The beginning of the war was ideological: Islamists and democrats against Communists. People went to their regions from the squares. Then war started in the regions....' Yet another informant said: 'After the war started, people forgot about party, ideas, etc. The main issue became this region and that region. They began to kill people because they were from this region or that region...' As the war progressed, it strengthened regional identities, and the parties to the conflict began to be more regionally homogenous.*<sup>719</sup>

In other words, civilian victimisation came to have a self-reinforcing quality: the more the two

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<sup>717</sup> On the general military effects of victimisation, see: Greenhill (2008); Kalyvas (2006); Hultman (2010); Kaldor (2007), 103-7.

<sup>718</sup> On polarisation dynamics in civil war generally, see Kalyvas (2006), 74-82.

<sup>719</sup> Kilavuz (2009b), 708.

sides targeted each others' constituencies, the more they reinforced an absolutist framing of targets that encouraged strategies of civilian victimisation. The emergence of 'Gharmi vs. Kulyabi' as a shaping mechanism for violent activity split communities into two discrete camps, in a targeting process that could not be transcended by individual behaviour – in Dushanbe, for example, the PFT targeted Gharmis and Pamiris regardless of their political affiliation or wartime activities. This rooting of targeting within innate human characteristics instead of behaviour generated a conflict that in its first phase was largely irreconcilable except by the armed victory of one faction over another, and that in its second phase saw a substantial amount of continued victimisation of the losing party.

Second, civilian victimisation influenced the war-fighting methods utilised by the PFT. In essence, it enabled the PFT to pursue militia-based warfare. The reliance on small, ad hoc, largely autonomous rural units as a vehicle to obtain military and strategic aims would have little hope of success if these militias chose restraint over victimisation. By engaging in attacks on civilians, militias were able to achieve an outsized impact, acquiring control over territory and resources with less effort and capacity than would otherwise be required.

Third, civilian victimisation by the PFT had an impact on the resources available to the adversary, in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side (from the perspective of the PFT), their attacks on kolkhozy and cities left opposition militias with few resources to sustain themselves or to share with their constituencies. PFT militias looted food and valuables, destroyed villages, and let crops rot in the fields. The successful PFT offensive through Kurgan-Tyube at the end of 1992 drove the opposition militias from Tajik territory altogether, denying them a domestic base of operation in the south. On the negative side, however, this offensive also pushed thousands of refugees into Afghanistan; as detailed in Chapter 4, these refugees become a strategic asset for the exiled opposition, providing a source of recruits, funding and cover.

Fourth, civilian victimisation led to an unspecified level of dissension within the ranks of the PFT. In Phase II of the war, for example, the predations of Salimov's Interior troops led to tensions within the regime, ending with Salimov's removal and a thorough purge of his ministry. More dramatic was the apparent disagreement over refugee victimisation that led to the deadly confrontation between Safarov and Saidov in March 1993. That two such brutal perpetrators of atrocities should meet their own ends quarrelling over civilian victimisation, whilst ironic, also illustrates a little-explored aspect of civilian victimisation, namely the fact that its use and acceptance are not monolithically present within a group – or consistent over

time. Safarov gave every appearance in the last months of his life that he was trying to create a narrative for his wartime behaviour that was conducive to his new role as one of the most powerful men in the country: yes, he had partaken in violent acts, but only in self-defence or to punish enemy forces who had done far worse to innocent people. With the opposition defeated, he publicly (if perhaps cynically) embarked on a campaign promoting peace and reconciliation.<sup>720</sup> The popularity of ‘Bobo Sangak’ amongst pro-government constituencies was undeniable; across the country, schools, kolkhozy and streets were named after him (until 2002, members of the new Tajik army trained at the ‘Sangak Safarov Military College’). In contrast, Saidov, who had a far less public role and was still participating in combat operations against opposition militias, maintained his wartime outlook and personal desire for vengeance against enemy constituencies. In terms of the instrumentality of civilian victimisation, Safarov perceived strategic (and political) incentives for restraint, whilst Saidov was swayed more by his perception of strategic and normative incentives for victimisation. This type of divergent interpretation is not uncommon amongst non-state armed groups, but the result is seldom so spectacular (or, it may be said, so satisfyingly just for their victims).

Finally, civilian victimisation by the PFT shaped heavily the strategic discourse of the conflict. In a dynamic somewhat unusual amongst civil wars, the PFT was facing not a state actor but another non-state group. This facilitated a process referred to earlier as the ‘socialisation of barbarism’, or the tendency of conflict actors to mirror each other’s behaviour. Operating as they were within the same strategic environment and with similar constraints, it is not surprising that both the PFT and the IRP/UTO militias engaged in civilian victimisation. As the next section explains, however, this mutually shared behaviour had an escalatory effect during the first year of the war.

## 6.2 Escalation and Resolution of the Conflict

For non-state forces who seek escalation and prolonged conflict to further their aims, civilian victimisation remains a favoured tactic.<sup>721</sup> There are a number of reasons why a non-state armed force would seek escalation – to provoke government over-reaction, for example, or to inflame sectarian tensions and thus rally support to its efforts.<sup>722</sup> As noted in Chapter 5, non-state groups may seek to prolong conflict as part of a campaign of attrition, or in order to

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<sup>720</sup> *The Independent*, 22/2/93; *New York Times*, 21/2/93; *Moscow News*, 9/4/93(a); RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 10/2/93.

<sup>721</sup> On the ‘conflict spiral’ and ‘structural change’ models of escalation, see: Pruitt and Rubin (1986); Kalyvas (2006), 59; Yanacopoulos and Hanlon (2006), 109.

<sup>722</sup> Kilcullen (2009), 30.

perpetuate conditions of instability as cover for illicit activities. Weak armed groups may pursue a 'crisis generation' approach, seeking influence and coercive capabilities beyond their military capacities.<sup>723</sup> Civilian victimisation plays a key role in escalation as it is the *most likely* act of violence to enable it. As discussed earlier, norms against attacking civilians are relatively strong throughout the world; atrocities thus inspire a greater degree of anger, revulsion and desire for revenge than attacks on armed forces or other official targets. They are also more likely to draw into the conflict segments of a population that had previously been dissociated from political disputes. One of the most notorious instances of successful escalation in recent years was the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, Iraq, reportedly by Al Qaeda in Iraq. The attack sparked sectarian violence and is seen as one of the key escalatory points in the Iraq conflict: it was following the mosque attack that the contest between Shi'ite and Sunni militias in Baghdad sharply intensified, leading to thousands of civilian deaths and the dramatic transformation of the city into sharply divided sectarian territories.<sup>724</sup>

Another key aim for non-state forces may be to disrupt formal conflict resolution efforts, for which purpose civilian victimisation is well suited. First, the emotional consequences of civilian victimisation make it extremely difficult to bring parties to the negotiating table.<sup>725</sup> Even if a conflict resolution process can be implemented, civilian victimisation can be utilised as a spoiler strategy – large-scale or dramatic attacks on civilians can quickly reignite hostilities and dash the prospects of negotiation. (The Arab-Israeli 'peace process' is perhaps an exemplar of the use of victimisation as a spoiler strategy for negotiations.) Second, civilian victimisation that involves large-scale 'cleansing' operations complicates conflict resolution by creating the need to either undo or accept the 'facts on the ground' created thereby. The acquisition of territory by 'cleansing' will not be seen as legitimate by other parties; however, if they cannot reverse this acquisition by force, it will prove even more difficult to undo it by negotiation. This leads to the development of complicated plans for phased withdrawal, de facto autonomy, demilitarised zones, et cetera – many of which have the effect of 'freezing' a conflict rather than resolving it. This is well illustrated by the continued political uncertainty in conflict zones from the 1990s, such as Bosnia and the southern Caucasus.

In Tajikistan, both escalation and spoiler dynamics can be attributed to civilian victimisation by the PFT. First, atrocities committed by the PFT during the summer of 1992 provoked and 'legitimised' retaliatory attacks by the opposition (and vice versa). Within weeks of the outbreak of conflict, both PFT and opposition militias were fighting less for political

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<sup>723</sup> Greenhill (2008), 14. See also Bangerter (2011), 376.

<sup>724</sup> Damluji (2010), 75-79; Kilcullen (2009), 30.

<sup>725</sup> Bangerter (2011), 366.

motivations than in response to the escalating brutality of the war.<sup>726</sup> According to Akbarzadeh, 'The conflict had basically lost its ideological coating and turned into clan warfare between Kulyabis on the one hand and Pamiris and Gharmis on the other'.<sup>727</sup>

Civilian victimisation by the PFT also contributed to escalation in the severity of the conflict. A key turning point in the war was the PFT's acquisition of tanks and their use of them against the town of Kurgan-Tyube in September 1992. Following their capture of the town, they continued to deploy the tanks against population centres in Kurgan-Tyube, thus swiftly overcoming lightly armed opposition militia. As part of this offensive in the south, the PFT also purposefully created huge flows of refugees, driving tens of thousands of people into Afghanistan and thus internationalising the conflict for several years to come.

Finally, the PFT were also key players in the escalation of the non-kinetic security challenges that emerged during Phase II – namely, criminality and corruption. As warlords, corrupt officials, narco-traffickers and abusive security officials, they greatly increased the insecurity of the population, even those far removed from the ongoing military operations.

In terms of conflict resolution, both PFT and opposition militias used violence as a spoiler strategy to derail ceasefires and negotiations. In Phase I, ceasefires in the summer of 1992 were violated by continued attacks on kolkhozy. Attempts to find a political settlement for control of Dushanbe in late 1992 were shoved aside by the PFT advance into the capital.<sup>728</sup> In Phase II, after the launch of the formal peace process, each round of negotiations was accompanied by armed attacks, by both government and guerrilla forces, in order to influence diplomatic outcomes. For example, Tajikistan's deputy prime minister was assassinated on the eve of the first round of talks in 1994, reportedly by 'irreconcilables' who objected to the commencement of negotiations (both the regime and the opposition included elements opposed to the talks). The attack succeeded in the near term: the Tajik regime suspended the talks, until pushed to the table by Russia the following month.<sup>729</sup> The Ashgabat round (December 1995 – January 1996) was disrupted first by the bombing of four villages in Gorno-Badakhshan and then by the assassination of the pro-regime Mufti of Tajikistan, Fathullo Sharifzoda. Without international pressure, it is doubtful that negotiations would have continued in the face of such provocations.<sup>730</sup> It should be noted, however, that *non-civilian* targets (particularly police force members and regime officials) tended to be favoured during

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<sup>726</sup> Rubin (1993), 78; Nourzhanov (2005), 113; *Moscow News* 20/9/92.

<sup>727</sup> Akbarzadeh (1996), 1112.

<sup>728</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 8 December 1992; BBC/Itar-Tass, 10 December 1992; BBC/Tajik Radio, 10 December 1992(b).

<sup>729</sup> AFP, 11/3/94; RPD/*Izvestiya*, 17/3/94.

<sup>730</sup> On the role of external states and organisations, see in particular Iji (2005).

Phase II spoiler attempts. One possibility is that this was due to the clearer signalling of attacks on official targets: killing civilians to send a political message, at a time when civilians were routinely harmed by criminals and warlords, was perhaps less effective than targeting security forces or political leaders.

In sum, civilian victimisation by both sides contributed to escalation and complicated resolution efforts. However, the PFT's advantages in weaponry and state support during Phase I, and their official status during Phase II, allowed them to escalate and disrupt to a greater degree than their opponents.

### 6.3 Dispersion of Violence

Militarily weak non-state armed forces face an incentive to target civilians because it requires fewer resources, training and capability compared to attacks on military targets. Civilian populations tend to be unarmed, or at most lightly armed; they can be attacked in their homes and villages, which are not set up with defensive works; they are not skilled in fighting or defending themselves; and many of them, particularly children and the elderly, are not capable of defending themselves. This accessibility of civilians to attack, and the relative ease with which large numbers of them may be killed or provoked into flight even by small groups of armed men, can encourage the entry into the conflict of actors who would otherwise be too weak, undisciplined, or incapable of mounting campaigns of violence against military or official targets.<sup>731</sup> In other words, the availability of strategies based on civilian victimisation lowers the barrier to entry into the conflict. Small paramilitary groups and militias that would otherwise operate at the margins, if at all, can play a decisive role, and are often relied upon by political actors who lack conventional capabilities and capacity.<sup>732</sup> Foreign fighters, despite their considerable disadvantages in operating in a foreign environment, can insert themselves into a conflict. Criminals and mentally deranged individuals who might not be tolerated in a force oriented toward attacks on military targets – which require a higher level of organisation, training and discipline – may be unleashed, often intentionally, on civilian populations.<sup>733</sup> (In the Bosnian war, for example, some estimated that 80 per cent of paramilitary members were 'common criminals', hired to do the 'dirty work' against civilian populations.<sup>734</sup>) In short, conflict actors tend to take advantage of the fact that war-fighting based upon strategies of victimisation can be done on the cheap, by empowering irregular armed forces and 'paying'

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<sup>731</sup> Kaldor (2007), 57; Mueller (2004), 16-23; Slim (2007), 237.

<sup>732</sup> Keen (2000), 24.

<sup>733</sup> Mueller (2004), 114-15; Greenhill (2008), 17; Kalyvas (2006), 61.

<sup>734</sup> Kaldor (2007), 57. See also: de Graaff (2005), 164-65.

them in plunder – essentially, funding conflict via civilian victimisation (in a manner not dissimilar to that of medieval European rulers).<sup>735</sup>

The use of civilian victimisation thus has the effect of dispersing violence, and the conflict it propels, more widely throughout a society – not only because of the immense harm inflicted upon the civilian population, but because it enables the participation in violence by individuals and groups who would not ordinarily be part of a conventional military campaign. This wider dispersion of violence throughout a society has several pernicious effects. First, it greatly complicates processes of conflict resolution, as there are more formal and informal actors in the conflict, some of whom may prefer a continuing profitable conflict environment to peace.<sup>736</sup> Second, it draws into the conflict individuals and groups motivated by criminal or purely emotional aims who are thus less likely to be constrained by group discipline or the traditional laws of war.<sup>737</sup> Third, the dispersion of violence spreads the effects of the conflict more widely through the society, setting the stage for significant levels of deprivation and victimisation as well as difficulties in postwar reconstruction and reconciliation. In short, the dispersion of violence facilitated by civilian victimisation creates a conflict environment that is considerably more complex, vicious and resistant to resolution than conflicts that are largely limited to military and official participants.

The Tajik civil war is, perhaps, an exemplar of this scenario. Phase I of the conflict was dominated by non-state armed forces engaged in civilian victimisation as a prime strategic mechanism. The nucleus of the original PFT militias was found in the criminal gangs mobilised by Safarov and Kenjaev at the beginning of the war, later joined by local mafia leaders and corrupt officials. As noted in Chapter 3, many of the leaders – not just members – of the PFT were criminals, a state of affairs not typically seen in stable state armed forces.

In addition, during the summer of 1992 many civilians were forced to join the Kulyabi militias: ‘As armed militias started to fight, people who otherwise would not have engaged in hostile action were forced to participate... Many young men were forced to join. Many informants report that the militias told them, “you will come with us or we will kill you”’.<sup>738</sup> In short, PFT militias often consisted of a mix of criminals, forcibly conscripted young men, and other civilians motivated by revenge or greed. This kind of force composition was only possible

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<sup>735</sup> Keen (2000), 28; Wennmann (2011), 336.

<sup>736</sup> Mueller (2004), 19, 115; Keen (2000), 24; Wennmann (2011), 347.

<sup>737</sup> Weinstein (2007).

<sup>738</sup> Kilavuz (2007), 192.



because the conflict was dominated by irregular warfare against civilian targets, not the more restrained targeting of military forces that requires a more disciplined and trained-up force.

During Phase II, the effects of the reliance upon criminal elements became even more obvious, as Kulyabi units incorporated into the new security and police forces engaged in continued victimisation of Gharimi and Pamiri populations. Another vector of dispersed participation in the conflict emerged with the arrival of foreign jihadist fighters, who joined the opposition campaign with few obstacles. This heavy concentration of criminal militias and foreign jihadists echoes the Bosnian conflict, although the latter featured large conventional forces in addition to paramilitaries. In both conflicts, however, key leaders utilised criminals in small armed forces to terrorise, expel and kill civilians belonging to rival constituencies, in order to claim their territory and resources.

In short, the dominance of civilian victimisation as a means of achieving strategic aims allowed the kind of militia-based warfare that could be waged by ordinary members of the population, not just proper military forces. The PFT drew heavily on criminal members of the population, enhancing the likelihood of further victimisation. The use of ordinary citizens instead of experienced military hands also diminished the possibility of discipline and central control of the militias, leaving largely autonomous bands to their own devices and decreasing the chances that incentives for restraint could be transmitted to them (as demonstrated most dramatically by the ethnic cleansing in Dushanbe in December 1992). This reliance on criminal militias greatly complicated the regime's attempts to stabilise the country after its victory in Dushanbe, as they continued to target civilians not only in Dushanbe but throughout the southern and eastern regions.

## **6.4 Territory and Resource Acquisition**

Whilst traditional insurgency theory encourages non-state actors to acquire control of resources and territory by obtaining the support of the local population – through the provision of protection, social services and ideological persuasion – in practice non-state armed groups often meet their logistical and spatial aims through violent coercion of the populace and outright theft.<sup>739</sup> This predation entails considerable costs (as discussed in Chapter 5) but is often the only viable strategy for small and militarily weak forces. At the extreme end of territory and resource acquisition is ethnic cleansing, or the use of violence to displace a targeted population. When successful, 'cleansing' operations drastically reshape the

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<sup>739</sup> This distinction is a key element in the 'new wars' thesis, described in Kaldor (2007), 103-07.

operational environment, allowing conflict actors to accrue territory without engaging in conventional warfare.<sup>740</sup>

In Tajikistan, the PFT was able to acquire control over significant amounts of territory and resources via civilian victimisation. First, during Phase I, the PFT gradually claimed more and more territory by attacking kolkhozy and towns and displacing civilians, culminating in their successful campaign against Dushanbe in late 1992. Interestingly, and unlike many conflicts in which the gains of ethnic cleansing are not relinquished, the regime eventually allowed the return of displaced populations, although refugees continued to be victimised for a long time and some Gharmsi villages – for example, around the Turkmenistan kolkhoz – remain Kulyabi to this day. Even with the return of refugees, however, the territories acquired during the war remained definitively under Kulyabi control, with official and bureaucratic structures filled with men loyal to the regime.

PFT militias also claimed a significant portion of their resources during Phase I through civilian victimisation – not only the food, money and other goods needed to support their military activities, but relief aid for their constituencies in the blockaded and starving Kulyab region.<sup>741</sup> Until they started receiving more aid from Uzbekistan and corrupt Russian soldiers in the late summer of 1992, civilian victimisation was virtually the only means of support available to PFT militias.

During Phase II, civilian victimisation also aided the PFT acquisition of land and resources – but in a different way, as PFT members were now scattered throughout the security forces, local administrations and criminal gangs. Ethnic cleansing through mass displacement was no longer an available strategy: refugee resettlement was the official order of the day, although refugees still represented a vulnerable population to exploit. Instead, former PFT members used more atomised violence (such as extortion and kidnapping) to coerce and harm civilians for the purpose of acquiring more wealth and/or control over a given ‘turf’. The aims of acquisition no longer included the support of war-fighting militias, but focused on personal enrichment. Nevertheless, civilian victimisation remained a prime vehicle for the pursuit of this aim.

## 6.5. Legitimacy

The relationship between civilian victimisation and the legitimacy of an actor who engages in it is a complicated one. Legitimacy is a key concept in intrastate warfare, especially in insurgency

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<sup>740</sup> For key examples and discussion, see: Damluji (2010), 78; *The New Yorker* (Anderson), 17/1/11, 41-42; *The New Yorker* (Gourevitch), 11/10/10, 108-09; Semelin (2005), 14.

<sup>741</sup> *Moscow News*, 2/7/92.

scenarios where both state and non-state actors aim to diminish the other's legitimacy amongst the population. Whilst it is important to note that legitimacy is not necessary to maintain a presence in a conflict zone (as seen in the persistence of AQI long after the vast majority of Iraqis turned against it), a lack of legitimacy can nevertheless cripple the effectiveness of a non-state actor due to its dependence on the general population for resources, sanctuary and information. An armed force with little or no legitimacy will not be able to obtain these inputs through persuasion, and will have to resort to coercion and/or criminality. This generally diminishes its moral authority and presents further obstacles to the achievement of its political aims. The FARC, for example, apparently lost a measure of legitimacy when some of its leaders became more deeply involved in the drugs trade, and as a result the Colombian government could treat the group increasingly as an illegitimate criminal actor rather than as a representative insurgent actor worthy of a negotiated settlement.<sup>742</sup> The failure of foreign jihadist forces to achieve their political aims in a variety of conflict settings can also be partly attributed to their inability to achieve local legitimacy.<sup>743</sup>

As noted in Chapter 5, however, there are ways for non-state armed forces to maintain a sense of legitimacy even whilst engaging in victimisation. The PFT managed to preserve a certain amount of legitimacy via the protection of their own constituencies and by primarily targeting civilians belonging to groups who had been successfully demonised and portrayed as hostile and threatening. A frequent theme in accounts of victimisation is that whatever transgressions may have been committed by the PFT, the acts of their enemies were far worse (hence bestowing a sort of *relative* legitimacy upon the PFT). For example, the Uzbek chairman of a kolkhoz in Kurgan-Tyube stated:

*The opposition plunged Urghuts [Uzbeks] into misery. Eighty per cent of their houses were burnt. I buried thirty of the massacred myself, including women and children... Cruelty has possessed the people. We are also accused of sins, but in comparison with Gharmis' bestiality they are kids' stuff.*<sup>744</sup>

Safarov himself deflected questions on the activities of his militias by invoking the horrors of atrocities committed by the opposition:

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<sup>742</sup> Wennmann (2011), 346. On the FARC, see Metelits (2010).

<sup>743</sup> Mitchell (2008).

<sup>744</sup> Quoted in Nourzhanov (2005), 127.

*'Where were you when the pseudo-Islamists shot women and children from atop an armoured personnel carrier? Where were you when they dumped bodies to be eaten by dogs? They burned everything, they stopped at nothing. Strong men would weep if they saw what I have had to see. Such crimes can never be forgotten'. His followers in the audience echoed a refrain with overflowing emotion: 'They skinned... They burned... The children, the women...' At the end there were no clear answers [on his militia]. But there was no question of his mystique or his power.'*<sup>745</sup>

The demonisation of the Gharmis did not end with the cessation of intense war-fighting in late 1992; in his first New Year's message to the Tajik population, President Rahmonov blamed the war on democratic and Islamic extremists and declared, 'I must say that history will never pardon the guilty, and those who are guilty before it should receive their punishment'.<sup>746</sup> Statements such as these helped set the stage for continued victimisation during Phase II of the war, as the judgment was perpetuated that victimisation by the opposition was illegitimate and rendered Gharmis fair game for retaliatory justice (whilst such victimisation by the PFT and its constituents was merely self-defence). Thus, the use of victimisation by conflict actors can play a key role in establishing normative reputations with respect to legitimacy, which in turn can generate further victimisation as actors deemed 'guilty' are targeted for retribution.

Another complex aspect of the relationship between victimisation and legitimacy is the fact that the very existence of conflict may lend a degree of legitimacy to actions that would otherwise be illegitimate.<sup>747</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5, an entire range of normative processes exist to transform murder into justifiable killing in wartime, and the emergence of a war economy legitimises economic activity that would normally be considered illicit (particularly with respect to the 'coping economy' that sustains civilians). The PFT represents a good example of this dynamic: Sangak Safarov evolved from a regional mafia boss to national hero, despite remarkable continuity in his criminal and transgressive behaviour.

In intrastate warfare with significant levels of civilian victimisation, often none of the participant forces has any real legitimacy in the eyes of the population. This creates an environment in which civilians respond to threats of violence without any real political or emotional preference for any one side; they are merely trying to survive, and become

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<sup>745</sup> *New York Times*, 21/2/93.

<sup>746</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 5/1/93(e).

<sup>747</sup> Keen (2000), 29.

dissociated from any purported political causes driving the conflict.<sup>748</sup> Thus, one possible effect of extensive civilian targeting on the dynamics of intrastate warfare is to *de-politicise* the conflict for much of the population. This was true to a certain extent in Tajikistan, where even in the intense first year of the war, a sense prevailed that the majority of the civilian population favoured an end to the fighting above the triumph of their putative 'side'. Deputy Premier Jamshed Karimov remained hopeful regarding the chances of a cease-fire as '95% of the population of both oblasts was in favour of stopping the bloodshed'.<sup>749</sup> Nurali Kurbanov, while lamenting civilian deaths in Kurgan-Tyube, also stated:

*We do not want to blame the people of Kulyab. The population of Kulyab, at large, support peace and want peace. However, those groups who are well known to all of us, their leaders being Sangak Safarov, Langari Languriyev, and others...were all involved in the bloodshed. The like of all this bloodshed and cruelty from which people suffered has not been seen in history.*<sup>750</sup>

However, despite a certain amount of de-politicisation, the realities of widespread victimisation meant that over time armed groups managed to retain a certain amount of legitimacy amongst their constituencies, due to the complex dynamics of victimisation and protection that are typical of intrastate war dominated by absolutist targeting. In a conflict where civilians are targeted on the basis of some innate characteristic, rather than their behaviour, they must place their hopes for survival with the armed groups protecting their communities. Thus, whatever atrocities they may perpetrate, they still gain some amount of legitimacy within their constituency on the basis of their civilian protection activities.<sup>751</sup> It is this dynamic that renders a good amount of insurgency theory and analysis invalid for conflicts like Tajikistan, where perpetrators were also protectors and thus did not automatically lose all legitimacy even with the transgressive atrocities they committed.

In sum, legitimacy cannot be considered solely through the prism of civilian victimisation. It must also be considered via an examination of its counterpart, civilian protection. The ability of the PFT to preserve any legitimacy at all, after a campaign of atrocities against vulnerable civilians, is inexplicable unless one considers the normative processes affecting Tajiks' perceptions of violence and the positive consequences of selective protection efforts.

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<sup>748</sup> Kalyvas (2006), 92-104, 116-18.

<sup>749</sup> BBC/Itar-Tass, 16/9/92.

<sup>750</sup> BBC/Tajik Radio, 30/9/92(b).

<sup>751</sup> McMullin (2009), 85-86.

## 6.6 Conclusion: Did Civilian Victimisation Help or Hurt the Popular Front?

This consideration of the impact of civilian victimisation on conflict dynamics naturally leads to the question of *strategic outcomes* – in short, whether the use of victimisation by the PFT affected the conflict in ways that were beneficial to the achievement of their aims. Much of the literature on intrastate war that addresses civilian victimisation, perhaps unduly influenced by traditional insurgency theory, presumes that it is counterproductive for non-state actors.<sup>752</sup> On the other hand, there appears to be a growing acknowledgment within the literature on the political economy of conflict that for many groups, ‘violence represents not a problem but a solution’, a claim supported by a growing number of case studies.<sup>753</sup> But what does the Tajik case study reveal?

I argue that for Phase I of the conflict, civilian victimisation was a necessary but not sufficient factor in the Kulyabi victory. It was necessary in that there is virtually no other means by which the PFT could have conducted or won the war, given its minimal capabilities and the strategic environment in which it was operating. However, when faced with an opposing non-state actor that also engaged in civilian victimisation, the result was stalemate throughout the summer of 1992. Each side attacked the other but could not gain a decisive upper hand.

The key ingredient that changed this equation was the increase in material capacity and resources that the PFT obtained in the late summer of 1992 thanks to support from actors in Uzbekistan and the Russian military. The acquisition of tanks and other weaponry, as well as space on Uzbek territory, gave the PFT an upper hand in Kurgan-Tyube and the contest for Dushanbe. Thus, whilst I argue that civilian victimisation was the foundation of the PFT victory, it is likely that on its own it may not have been sufficient to overcome the opposition.

In Phase II of the conflict, it does not appear that civilian victimisation had much utility in the ongoing struggle against the UTO. No longer fighting in the flat lowlands of southern Tajikistan, but in the inaccessible mountains of eastern Tajikistan, the regime had less freedom of manoeuvre. It could and did create new flows of refugees whenever it conducted counteroffensives eastward, but this was less helpful in a scenario where the aim was not to acquire territory but to stabilise and normalise the local situation. The abuse of civilians by security forces only helped to maintain local allegiance to Gharmi militias instead of the central government. Thus, within the arena of a government counterinsurgency campaign in eastern

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<sup>752</sup> See, for example, O’Neill (1990), 84-85; Walzer (2006), 179-87; US Department of the Army (2004, 2006); Cronin (2006), 28; Michael and Scolnick (2006). On the issue of utility for state actors, see Downes (2007).

<sup>753</sup> Keen (2000), 25.

Tajikistan, victimisation of Gharmis by former PFT militiamen could be considered counterproductive in that it did not advance strategic aims. However, it is likely that the regime could not have achieved those aims even if it did not engage in victimisation during this phase of the war, due to the unforgiving terrain and ongoing Gharmi hostility it had engendered with its predations during Phase I. The fact that the UTO was not strong enough to take advantage of the vulnerabilities created by such victimisation also helped neutralise the disadvantage to the government. Finally, a lack of regard for civilians eased the burden of distinction in government military operations, enabling the regime to send ill-trained and criminalised troops to the frontlines and still achieve a measure of success.

In the realm of the broader victimisation of the civilian population – i.e., criminality, corruption and the abuse of refugees – civilian victimisation continued to be an instrumental and productive endeavour for former PFT members. At the governmental level, victimisation allowed officials to stay in office, accumulate wealth and create personal patronage networks and fiefdoms. Outside the official sphere, victimisation allowed groups to acquire the goods and resources necessary for survival or for personal enrichment. Thus, I argue that *overall*, civilian victimisation continued to be beneficial for PFT members during Phase II, in that it actively advanced their aims or at the worst did not overly impede them.

In short, a strategic environment of near-anarchy and security privatisation, coupled with individual aims of personal survival, power accumulation and material acquisition, generated a strong actor preference for (or at least, tolerance of) civilian victimisation strategies. Such strategies were easily implemented given the status of former PFT commanders and members following their victory in 1992, the easy availability of weapons and illicit funding via the drugs trade, and the lack of protection for the civilian population. Overall, the outcomes of PFT civilian victimisation were largely positive relative to their aims: not only did it aid them militarily and enable them to win the war, but many former PFT members gained substantial amounts of wealth and power and the Rahmonov regime itself has stayed in power for twenty years. In this sense, therefore, the PFT represents a case study of ‘successful’ civilian victimisation. However, as the next chapter will show, the strategic outcomes for the Tajik state as a whole cannot be said to be as positive or successful.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE LONG-TERM STRATEGIC OUTCOMES OF CIVILIAN VICTIMISATION DURING THE TAJIK CIVIL WAR

At the formal end of the civil war in 1997, peace and security in Tajikistan appeared fragile indeed. Five years of conflict had devastated the Tajik economy as well as the state's ability to provide even the most basic services to the population. Criminal networks threaded the countryside and corrupt politicians prioritised their own interests over national needs. Tajikistan became a virtual open gate for the trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and recalcitrant warlords operated from bases within its territory. Attempts to address these problems were hampered by continued regional tensions and an authoritarian and nepotistic regime. Few expected President Rahmonov to stay in power for any considerable length of time.

Many of the same problems continued to afflict the country as of 2013, seemingly demonstrating that state weakness may come to possess its own form of stability. Rahmonov, somewhat astoundingly, has maintained his presidency (via regular, if questionable, elections) and continued its authoritarian bent with few domestic political challengers. (Like many Tajiks, he 'de-Russified' his name in the postwar era, and is referred to as President Rahmon for the remainder of this dissertation.) The economy, whilst improved from its low ebb in the mid-1990s, remains overly dependent on a vast flow of remittances from Tajik labour migrants as well as the illicit proceeds of narco-trafficking and other criminal enterprises. Lawlessness has subsided whilst corruption and organised crime have become solidly embedded in the political and economic infrastructure. The near-elimination of the IMU and cooptation of local warlords reduced the non-state threat to the state for many years, but recent incidents point to a possible regeneration of militant activity. In short, whilst the severity and specific nature of particular threats has fluctuated over the years, there is a general consistency in the types of threats facing Tajikistan in its postwar era.

This chapter addresses the final element of the central research question: *what were the long-term strategic effects of civilian victimisation?* It considers the postwar security threats to Tajikistan within three overarching categories – external threats; internal threats/non-state; and internal threats/societal – and evaluates whether civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war affected the nation's longer-term security challenges. The chapter concludes by briefly considering the effects of civilian victimisation on the potential for future conflict in Tajikistan.



The central finding of this chapter is that evaluations of the impact of victimisation vary immensely depending on how one interprets the concept of 'security threat'. Within the fields of international relations and strategic studies, 'security threats' have traditionally been limited to threats to and from sovereign states (a tendency that continues to dominate realist schools of thought). The end of the Cold War, however, yielded an expanded consideration of threats, as new conflicts and political violence were perceived to be driven by non-state actors and to derive from more amorphous political and socioeconomic forces.<sup>754</sup> 'Instability' itself came to be seen as a threat, not merely a condition, thus greatly expanding the universe of factors thought to potentially impact state security. The globalisation of trade, transport, finance and communications also created new types and locales of challenges, and 'transnational threats' such as narco-terrorism and organised crime were increasingly enshrined as national security threats by Western states.<sup>755</sup> Finally, the emerging concept of 'human security' – comprising not just an absence of conflict but political and economic security for a state's citizens – led to an increased emphasis on the 'security-development nexus' and a further expansion of the universe of threatening variables.<sup>756</sup>

All of these processes were accelerated by the 11 September 2001 attacks and the US-led War on Terror, which elevated non-state actor threats to a paradigmatic level and reoriented international security cooperation, operations and norms. Failed and failing states were perceived as pre-eminent threats, not only for their ability to generate regional disorder and humanitarian catastrophe, but because of the potential use of 'ungoverned spaces' and zones of instability by transnational terrorists and criminal networks.<sup>757</sup>

Much effort has been expended in recent decades on the crafting of typologies and frameworks for analysis of contemporary security threats. For the purposes of this relatively brief discussion, and considering the relative isolation and weakness of the Tajik state, I have grouped the security threats to Tajikistan into three categories. First, *external threats* refer to foreign state and non-state actors whose actions negatively impact (or potentially negatively impact) the safety and security of the Tajik state and its population. *Internal threats/non-state* include the terrorist, extremist and criminal non-state actors operating within Tajikistan, which threaten the government's monopoly on force and victimise the civilian population. *Internal*

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<sup>754</sup> Robinson (2001), 121; Kaldor (2007).

<sup>755</sup> UNODC (2010), 29-31; De Danieli (2011), 129; Houlahan (2003), 3; McMullin (2009), 94; Tadjbakhsh (2008), 14; US Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime (2011).

<sup>756</sup> Tschirgi, et al. (2010), 2; Stewart (2004), 262; Swanstrom (2007).

<sup>757</sup> Rotberg (2002); Makarenko (2004), 138-39; Menkhaus (2010), 172-73. Also see Menkhaus (2010), pp. 181-87, for a good discussion of why the concept of 'ungoverned spaces' is problematic.

*threats/societal* refer to developments in the political and socioeconomic spheres that create vulnerabilities to non-state actor attacks and/or state collapse. This presentation thus captures the evolving definition of security threats as well as the full range of potentially damaging actors and forces confronting Tajikistan.

## 7.1 External Security Threats

Leaving aside the interminable Afghan war to the south, Tajikistan is fortunate to be ensconced in a region that has been free from major *conventional* conflicts for many decades. There is also a certain level of regional security harmonisation, both in terms of threat perception and preferred strategic responses, due to shared Soviet legacies and similar authoritarian tendencies. This has facilitated a number of regional initiatives – such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – and the spread of larger international security frameworks such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and NATO’s Partnership for Peace, all of which Tajikistan has joined.<sup>758</sup> These multilateral organisations focus heavily on non-state-actor threats, including terrorism and narco-trafficking, as well as on improving inter-state cooperation in the security and economic arenas. Within this multilateral cooperation, however, differences persist amongst the Central Asian republics on a number of issues, including relations with Russia and the United States and domestic approaches to Islamist groups.<sup>759</sup>

More important, this regional collaboration should not obscure a number of security threats that have emanated from Tajikistan’s neighbours and partners. Whilst these have proven containable and more ‘potential’ than ‘actual’ in the postwar era, the persistence of their underlying drivers means that Tajikistan cannot yet discount the possibility that they may spark significant political violence or instability.<sup>760</sup> This is especially true with regards to Afghanistan, whose future remains uncertain given the upcoming US/NATO drawdown of forces.

Another source of unpredictability and potential volatility is the Ferghana Valley, commonly referred to as the ‘tinderbox’ of Central Asia. Analysts have been predicting its eventual explosion into violence since the breakup of the USSR, due to its unpopular border delimitations; its high population density and communal competition for land, water and

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<sup>758</sup> On Tajikistan’s multilateral efforts, see Akiner (2009), 363-64; Weitz (2004), 515-17; ICG (2001c), 19-22.

<sup>759</sup> ICG (2001c), 2, 13; Sanderson, et al. (2010), 4.

<sup>760</sup> See Jackson (2005) on the tendency of outside analysts to privilege potential over actual security threats in Central Asia.

livelihoods; its high religiosity and its role as a crucible for Islamic extremists, such as the founders of the IMU; and its centrality to the region's enormous narco-trafficking and other illicit flows.<sup>761</sup> Nevertheless, whilst there have been ongoing low-grade confrontations between communities as well as occasional large-scale episodes of violence (notably in Osh, where clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents killed hundreds in both 1990 and 2010), Ferghana continues to simmer along without full-scale conflict erupting. The absence of solutions to its potential conflict triggers, however, keep it under consideration as a potential flashpoint.

The following sections consider the state and non-state security threats associated with Tajikistan's neighbours and international partners.

### **7.1.1 Uzbekistan**

Since independence, Uzbekistan has posed the greatest state-level security threat to the Tajik state (keeping in mind that the considerable threats emanating from Afghanistan are non-state in nature). During the civil war, Uzbekistan aided and armed the pro-communist faction that succeeding in driving the opposition from Dushanbe. Dissatisfied with the peace settlement, which excluded the Uzbek factions in Tajikistan and installed Islamists within the government and security forces, and fearing the contagion effects of Tajik state weakness, Uzbekistan continued to violate Tajik sovereignty and use blockade-style tactics as a form of political coercion.<sup>762</sup>

The most overt acts committed by Uzbekistan occurred in response to IMU incursions into Ferghana from Tajik territory in 1999-2000 (described in more detail in Section 7.2.1). Following the first incursion, Uzbekistan bombed several villages in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>763</sup> Several thousand Tajik residents of Uzbekistan were also expelled, accused of aiding the invading forces.<sup>764</sup> In 2000, Uzbekistan placed landmines along the Tajik-Uzbek border. The mines were often placed on disputed or Tajik territory; dozens of civilians have been killed.<sup>765</sup> (It should be noted that the residents of central and eastern Tajikistan also continue to suffer from landmines and unexploded ordinance from the civil war era, with more than 800 killed or wounded countrywide.<sup>766</sup>) Uzbekistan's response to the IMU incursions was

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<sup>761</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999); ICG (2001c); Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008; Interview (NDI), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>762</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007), 317.

<sup>763</sup> ICG (2001c), 6; Jonson (2006), 114; Engvall (2006), 840.

<sup>764</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 13; ICG (2001a), 28; IWPR, 26/5/06(b).

<sup>765</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 13; ICG (2001c), 9; RFE/RL, 30/12/09.

<sup>766</sup> Tajikistan Mine Action Centre, Implementation Results 2011, accessed 21/2/12 at: [www.mineaction.tj](http://www.mineaction.tj)

perhaps ironic given that only recently, in 1998, Colonel Khudoberdyev had utilised Uzbek territory as a base for his unsuccessful invasion of Leninabad (as discussed below). Uzbek support for Khudoberdyev and other potentially subversive Uzbek actors in Tajikistan created lingering distrust within the Tajik regime.

Uzbekistan has also at times taken political advantage of its ability to apply a stranglehold to Tajik imports and the movement of peoples. As a result of Soviet transport infrastructure decisions, the only rail links into Tajikistan traverse Uzbek territory and can be easily shut down (as they were for months after a mysterious railway explosion in Uzbekistan in November 2011; Uzbekistan attributed the blast to terrorists but it was more likely an act of political sabotage by the regime<sup>767</sup>). Until the recent completion of a road under the Zarafshan mountains, traffic between central and northern Tajikistan had to go through Uzbekistan during the winter months, leaving Tajiks vulnerable to harassment and extortion at Uzbek border posts.<sup>768</sup> In addition, Tajikistan remains dependent upon Uzbek natural gas imports for its energy needs. On a number of occasions, Uzbekistan has simply shut off energy supplies or shut down transport routes as a means of applying political pressure on the Tajik regime.<sup>769</sup> (It has come under heavy criticism for doing so, given the dire effects of such actions on the already impoverished Tajik population.) These Uzbek blockades have been instituted for a variety of political reasons, most recently in response to Tajik plans to build an enormous hydroelectric plant at Roghun, which Uzbekistan claims would severely impact its own water resources (critical for maintaining its all-important cotton industry).

There is also a non-state threat emanating from Uzbekistan, in the form of jihadists and other activists expelled or fleeing the state and settling in Tajikistan.<sup>770</sup> Such flows have tended to occur after significant acts of violence in Uzbekistan, such as the Tashkent bombings in February 1999 and the Andijan massacre of 2005, both of which the Karimov regime blamed on Islamist terrorists. Uzbek jihadists bear no love for the Tajik regime either, and as discussed below their presence in Tajikistan constitutes the main terrorist threat in the country.

### **7.1.2 Kyrgyzstan**

There have been no significant state-level threats from Kyrgyzstan in the postwar era, and this seems likely to continue. Kyrgyzstan possesses many of the same domestic challenges as

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<sup>767</sup> EurasiaNet, 31/3/12.

<sup>768</sup> IWPR, 26/5/06(b); ICG (2001c), 14; Jonson (2006), 116.

<sup>769</sup> US Department of State (2010), 3; EurasiaNet, 31/3/12; Jonson (2006), 117-21.

<sup>770</sup> IWPR, 4/1/07; Lubin, et al. (1999), 48-55.

Tajikistan – poverty, corruption, organised crime, a growing militant problem – with the added worry of serious communitarian conflict (as demonstrated in Osh in 2010) and relative volatility in the regime (there have been two ‘revolutions’ in the past seven years).<sup>771</sup> Thus, the Kyrgyz regime has neither the incentive nor the capacity to seriously threaten Tajikistan at the present time.

Tensions do flare occasionally between the two states, however, generally in response to localised cross-border disputes in the Ferghana region over access to resources and other issues.<sup>772</sup> In 2003, tensions over the installation of border regimes by both sides turned to violence, with the destruction of one Tajik and one Kyrgyz border post.<sup>773</sup> In 2008, Tajik police and residents from the Isfara region crossed the border in Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region and tried to destroy a dam on the Aksay River that had reduced water supplies to their farms, generating a mini-crisis.<sup>774</sup> More recently, there have been small-scale clashes amongst Tajik and Kyrgyz villages over land ownership and water for agriculture.<sup>775</sup> None of these disputes are likely to disappear as long as borders remain poorly demarcated and the infrastructure that could support expanding populations remains unbuilt.

### **7.1.3 Afghanistan**

With the end of its civil war in 1997, Tajikistan once again became a conduit for aid to Afghanistan; this time, however, it was not the Soviets resupplying their army units but the Russians funnelling assistance to the beleaguered Northern Alliance (which also operated bases on Tajik territory).<sup>776</sup> Tajik militants and refugees in northern Afghanistan had been mostly repatriated: the UTO no longer needed them in Afghanistan to support an insurgency, but in Tajikistan to provide a domestic base of political support.<sup>777</sup> (The advance of the Taliban and improving conditions back home also helped incentivise refugees to return.) The tangling of the Tajik and Afghan civil wars was gradually winding down, although the personal and illicit networks forged between 1992 and 1997 remained.

The Taliban regime that governed most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 did not pose a conventional military threat to Tajikistan, but its campaign against the Northern Alliance and

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<sup>771</sup> ICG (2012); Interview (IFES), Bishkek, 2008; Interview (NDI), Bishkek, 2008; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>772</sup> IOM (2012), 12; Lubin, et al. (1999), 55-56; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003); Interview (UN-Tajikistan), Dushanbe, August 2008.

<sup>773</sup> Maynes (2003), 128.

<sup>774</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 93.

<sup>775</sup> EurasiaNet, 7/6/11; EurasiaNet, 2/8/12; RFE/RL, 23/4/11.

<sup>776</sup> Jonson (2006), 49; Lubin, et al. (1999), 120-21.

<sup>777</sup> Abdullaev and Barnes (2001), 50; Heathershaw (2011), 33.

oppressive rule generated consistent cross-border fears of massive refugee flows and other spillover effects from conflict and instability.<sup>778</sup> The opium trade, with all its regional and global ill effects, continued to become deeply embedded within the Afghan war economy and broader society (a temporary Taliban ban on cultivation – the reasons for which remain debated – did little to halt exports, thanks to massive stockpiles).<sup>779</sup> In addition, the Taliban hosted the IMU, which had not given up its mandate of toppling Central Asian regimes.

With the US-led campaign in Afghanistan in 2001, both of these concerns were lifted. The IMU appeared to have been virtually destroyed, and the Northern Alliance victory seemed to promise stability in northern Afghanistan. The new Karzai regime had no particular reason to threaten its northern neighbours. Whilst this absence of state-level threats remains, at least for the immediate future, Afghanistan's post-2002 descent into renewed war and instability has posed a number of non-state security threats for Tajikistan. According to President Rahmon, the primary threats emanating from Afghanistan are terrorism, Islamic extremism, narco-trafficking, arms smuggling and illegal migration.<sup>780</sup> These non-state threats are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Depending on the turn of events following the US/NATO drawdown, Afghanistan could become an even greater source of security challenges for Tajikistan. It already hosts a rejuvenated IMU and other militant groups, and a new regime might halt anti-trafficking efforts and/or spur a new flood of refugees (as noted by UNHCR, 'The situation in Afghanistan always carries a risk of influx of Afghan refugees in Tajikistan').<sup>781</sup>

#### **7.1.4 Russia and the United States**

Since independence, Tajikistan has essentially outsourced the protection of its security and sovereignty, first to Russia, and then increasingly after 9/11 to the United States and Europe, who required a stable Tajikistan in support of their operations in Afghanistan and also finally perceived a threat to their own interests arising from the Central Asian drugs trade and terrorist movements.<sup>782</sup> Russian, American and European military and economic assistance has proved vital for the defence of Tajik borders, the development of security forces and improved capacity in counterterrorism and counternarcotics. It has also, however, created a serious dependence on foreign support that leaves Tajikistan vulnerable in the event of its removal. As

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<sup>778</sup> ICG (2001c), 8.

<sup>779</sup> For a good overview of the Afghan opium industry during and after the Taliban era, see Felbab-Brown (2006).

<sup>780</sup> Bleuer (2012), 1; IWPR, 26/5/06(c).

<sup>781</sup> UNHCR (2002), 4; RFE/RL, 14/7/11.

<sup>782</sup> De Danieli (2011), 136; Jonson (2006), 49; Maynes (2003).

noted above, there are serious concerns as to what will happen when US and ISAF forces draw down in Afghanistan.

With respect to Russia, there is an additional security threat that is somewhat more indirect. As will be discussed below, a prime driver of stability in Tajikistan at the present time is the fact that hundreds of thousands of Tajiks – many of them young men – live as labour migrants in Russia. This relieves pressure on the regime to provide for a huge tranche of the population whilst also removing from the country that segment of society most likely to provoke political unrest and violence. In recent years, however, Russia has increasingly regulated and limited migrant levels, and the economic downturn has led to calls for a radical reduction in migrant labour. The general consensus is that this could be catastrophic for Tajikistan; it is considered one of the few shocks that could indeed lead to renewed political violence or even regime collapse.<sup>783</sup>

In sum, Tajikistan faces an array of security threats emanating from its neighbours and key patrons that has thus far proven containable yet unpredictable and volatile. It should be noted that Tajikistan would face additional potential security threats in the event of an outbreak of serious regional conflict, given its vulnerability to cross-border violence and destabilising flows of arms, drugs, militants and refugees.

## **7.2 Internal Threats: Non-State**

The threat assessments embedded in the literature on postwar Tajikistan are striking in their overwhelming concentration on internal actors and near-exclusion of conventional state threats.<sup>784</sup> Akiner, for example, argues that the primary threats to Tajik peace and security are narco-trafficking, the criminalisation of politics and society, and chronic poverty.<sup>785</sup> The Tajik government tends to emphasise its vulnerability to terrorism and narco-trafficking – coincidentally (or, likely, not) the two areas in which it is most likely to receive Western security assistance and aid.<sup>786</sup> In short, the Tajik emphasis on internal threats is a function not only of its relatively non-belligerent neighbours, but its internal weakness and participation in international markets for foreign aid.<sup>787</sup> This section highlights the internal threats stemming from non-state actors, whilst Section 7.3 will detail the domestic trends and conditions that

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<sup>783</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 27; OSCE (2009); ICG (2009), 12-13.

<sup>784</sup> Engvall (2006), 830; ICG (2001c), 14.

<sup>785</sup> Akiner (2001), 86. Abdullaev and Frasier (2003) also emphasise poverty as a conflict trigger.

<sup>786</sup> De Danieli (2011), 136-39; Wiegmann (2009), 22, 34, 37; Weitz (2004), 518; IWPR, 18/11/09.

<sup>787</sup> For summaries of the substantial international assistance acquired by Tajikistan in the postwar era, see: Akiner (2001), 60-62; Wiegmann (2009), 39-44; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 29-42.

also threaten Tajik security.

The Tajik civil war, coming so close on the heels of the disintegration of the Soviet empire, led to the emergence of a broad range of non-state actors who posed varied challenges to state authority and differing levels of harm to the civilian population. The postwar DDR [demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration] process was hailed as a pragmatic recognition of facts on the ground: the wholesale incorporation of non-state militias into government security forces essentially prioritised reintegration over disarmament, and led to a relatively swift demobilisation of illegal armed groups (by 2000, nearly 7,000 opposition militia had been demobilised, with about 5,000 of them joining government security forces).<sup>788</sup> As a result, the Tajik case is often presented as an unorthodox yet successful example of DDR.<sup>789</sup> There are two problems with this interpretation, however: first, there were a number of field commanders and militiamen who rejected the peace deal and reintegration; and second, the incorporation of heavily criminalised militias into state forces served to embed corruption within Tajik state structures and further empower criminal actors.<sup>790</sup> As this chapter will show, the regime dealt reasonably well with the first challenge for a number of years, whilst largely neglecting to address the second in any substantive way.

In the postwar era, Tajikistan has confronted a terrorist threat from the IMU and its probable splinter groups, localised security threats from non-coopted field commanders and minor warlords, and the expansion of narco-trafficking and organised crime networks. Occasionally, these threats converged, as in the case of the former opposition commander and local warlord Mullo Abdullo, who also enjoyed connections to the IMU and narco-traffickers.

A review of contemporary reportage and analysis reveals some general trends with respect to the intensity of non-state-actor threats.<sup>791</sup> In the five years after the peace agreement, strategies of co-optation and DDR considerably reduced the number of non-state actors and improved government control and authority (with the notable exception of eastern Tajikistan).<sup>792</sup> By 2002, most warlords and terrorists had been neutralised as potential challengers to state authority, and the following few years were relatively quiet. By 2006,

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<sup>788</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 19; Heathershaw (2011), 34; Nourzhanov (2005), 124; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007), 316; ICG (2001a), 16.

<sup>789</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007, 2009); Wiegmann (2009), 128.

<sup>790</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 54-55. On the risks of criminalisation within DDR, see McMullin (2009), 91-93; Cockayne (2010), 2009.

<sup>791</sup> See Roche and Heathershaw (2010a); Tadjbakhsh (2008); Heathershaw (2005); Torjesen, et al. (2005); Jonson (2006); ICG (2011); IWPR, 26/5/06(c); IWPR, 3/10/06; IWPR, 4/1/07.

<sup>792</sup> The regime's strategy followed the definition of co-optation provided by Philip Selznick: 'the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organisation as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence'. Quoted in Sinno (2011), 328.



however, sporadic violence in Ferghana was being attributed to IMU militants, and by 2008 both foreign militants and local warlords were active once again in the Rasht (Karategin) Valley. September 2010 saw the first suicide bombing in Tajikistan as well as armed clashes in Rasht, and there are fears that spiralling violence and a resurgent IMU in northern Afghanistan will pose an increasing security challenge in eastern Tajikistan. This resurgence of armed violence in recent years has dampened somewhat the more optimistic assessments of Tajik security that emerged in the early 2000s.

This section groups the universe of non-state actors in postwar Tajikistan into five categories, and considers each in turn: 1) Terrorist groups; 2) Islamist extremists; 3) Local warlords; 4) Narco-trafficking; 5) Organised crime. (Note that whilst narco-trafficking is itself a form of organised crime, its outsized impact on Tajikistan warrants its consideration as a separate category.) In doing so, it copes once again with the challenge of ascertaining whether violence is ‘criminal’ or ‘political’, given the essential hybrid nature of most non-state groups in postwar Tajikistan. (Indeed, Makarenko lists Tajikistan as one of her ‘black hole states’ that pose the greatest international security threat amongst the actors on her ‘crime-terror continuum’: a weak or failing state that permits freedom of action to hybrid criminal-political actors.<sup>793</sup>) Given the hybrid nature of not only non-state actors but the heavily corrupt Tajik regime itself, however, pinpointing whether armed violence is criminally or politically motivated is less salient for the purposes of this discussion than tracing the effects of such violence on state and society.

### **7.2.1 Terrorist Groups: The IMU**

The terrorist threat in Tajikistan is primarily represented by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its various permutations and splinter groups, which were incubated in eastern Tajikistan during the civil war. At that time, the Islamist opposition in Tajikistan advocated more limited aims than salafi-jihadists in other parts of the Islamic world. In part this reflected the moderate, Hanafi and Sufi Islam traditionally practiced in Tajikistan and the limits of external Wahhabi/Deobandi fundamentalist influences; it could also be traced to the Soviet legacy and the obstacles to establishing a strict Islamic order in the face of popular hostility to the concept. Nevertheless, their cause attracted salafi-jihadists from other parts of Central Asia and the Muslim world, whose presence amongst the Tajik opposition began to be

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<sup>793</sup> Makarenko (2004), 138.

noted in the summer of 1993 and was eventually confirmed by IRP leader Himmatzoda.<sup>794</sup> In a pattern seen in other conflict zones, such as Bosnia, the IRP accepted their help out of necessity even when disagreeing with their ideology and their rigid interpretations of Islam.

By most accounts, IRP members felt particularly alienated from the Arab mujahidin who migrated to the area after being forced to leave Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1993.<sup>795</sup> They had little in common, and the Arab militants reportedly engaged in more brutal behaviour toward both combatants and civilians than the IRP militants approved of.<sup>796</sup> This civilian victimisation crippled the Arabs' war effort by preventing effective cohesion and coordination with their native hosts. They tended not to stay long, however, as the cool welcome they received and the outbreak of war in Bosnia and later Chechnya drew them away.<sup>797</sup> (One such militant was the notorious jihadist commander Ibn Al-Khattab, a Saudi veteran of the Afghan war who fought with the Tajik opposition before commanding the Arab mujahidin in Chechnya. A former aide to Nuri said he was 'quickly encouraged to move on'.<sup>798</sup>) Thus, the experience of Arab jihadists in Tajikistan conforms to that in other conflict zones, such as Bosnia and Iraq: civilian victimisation contributed to their strategic failure by alienating them from local civilians and combatants and impeding their coordination with other groups.<sup>799</sup>

Salafi-jihadists from the Uzbek districts of the Ferghana Valley, however, established a much more lingering presence. As noted by Zviagelskaya, 'In contrast to their Tajik brethren the Ferghana Islamists fully deserved the name of fundamentalists'.<sup>800</sup> In 1992-1993, the Uzbek regime expelled and arrested hundreds of jihadist activists and foreign missionaries from its Ferghana districts, partly with the justification that such actions were necessary to prevent the sort of communitarian violence that had overwhelmed Tajikistan.<sup>801</sup> As their exile coincided with the beginning of the Tajik conflict, many of the Uzbek jihadists migrated to Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan and fought with the UTO, including Tahir Yuldashev and Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovitch Khojaev (aka Juma Namangani). The Uzbek jihadists contributed significantly to UTO operations, but tensions between the groups remained. The Uzbeks, rigid and

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<sup>794</sup> AFP, 27/7/93; RPD/*Izvestia*, 31/7/93; Inter-Press Service, 22/8/94; UPI, 24/8/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 26/8/94(b); BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/8/94; UPI, 31/8/94; RPD/*Izvestia*, 2/9/94; BBC/Interfax, 14/6/96; BBC/Interfax, 26/7/96. See also: US Department of State (1995).

<sup>795</sup> AP, 10/4/93; AP, 29/8/93; CNN, 12/1/94; BBC/Itar-Tass, 31/8/94; AFP, 28/3/95.

<sup>796</sup> The Taliban would have similar issues with Arab volunteers in the mid-2000s; in some regions, they were asked to leave 'in order not to alienate the population'. Giustozzi (2008), 131.

<sup>797</sup> Kohlmann (2004), 132; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008; Interview (BBC Tajik Service), London, 2008.

<sup>798</sup> ICG (2011), 11.

<sup>799</sup> Mitchell (2008).

<sup>800</sup> Zviagelskaya (1997), 6; Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008. See Naumkin (2005), 58-60 and 96-97 on the emergence of Adolat. See also: Cornell (2005b), 626; Weitz (2004), 506; Lewis (2008), 187; Lubin, et al. (1999), 7-8, 48-49.

<sup>801</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 51; BBC/Interfax, 8/10/93; BBC/APN, 20/10/93; RPD/*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 6/1/94. Foreign missionaries from the Arab Middle East and Pakistan had played a key role in instructing Uzbek Islamists. Naumkin (2005), 66.

uncompromising, did not approve of IRP negotiations with the Tajik regime. Later, Yuldashev and Namangani grew closer to the Taliban, the arch-enemies of the UTO's main patron in northern Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Massoud. With the signing of peace accords in Tajikistan in 1997, Yuldashev, Namangani and many other Uzbek jihadists split from the UTO coalition.

Despite their 'irreconcilable' status, and the utter hostility they evoked from the regimes in Dushanbe and Tashkent, the Uzbek jihadists managed to retain operational bases in eastern Tajikistan, thanks largely to their wartime connections to Mirzo Ziyoyev, the powerful former UTO field commander who became 'Minister of Emergencies' after the war. Reportedly, under his protection, the Uzbek jihadists used these mountain training camps as bases for their incursions and attacks into neighbouring countries.<sup>802</sup>

In 1998, Yuldashev and Namangani officially formed the IMU, with the goal of toppling the Karimov regime and establishing an Islamic state in the Ferghana Valley. Their first major military operation occurred in August 1999, when a group of several dozen militants infiltrated the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan and – over the course of several weeks – seized several small mountainous posts and a number of Kyrgyz and foreign hostages.<sup>803</sup> Whilst the militants initially demanded the release of political prisoners in Uzbekistan, their receipt of large ransom payments (including \$2-5 million from the Japanese government) has led to speculation regarding the strength of their pecuniary motives. After releasing the hostages, the militants returned to Tajikistan, where even their connections to Ziyoyev could no longer shield them from the combined wrath of Dushanbe and Tashkent. Namangani and his fellow militants were hastily airlifted on Russian Army helicopters to northern Afghanistan, where they spent the winter. In 2000, however, Namangani returned to eastern Tajikistan with several hundred men. Yet again in August, he launched a second incursion into Ferghana, this time crossing into Kyrgyzstan and then attempting to infiltrate Uzbek territory, before being repulsed by Uzbek army units. Again, Namangani and his men were airlifted to northern Afghanistan, where this time they stayed.

The incursions of 1999 and 2000 brought enormous attention to the IMU and its cause, but were strategically puzzling. To this day, analysts disagree on why the IMU pursued such a course of action. One theory is that they served some purpose in facilitating the IMU's control

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<sup>802</sup> Akiner (2001), 68; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007), 324; ICG (2001c), 6.

<sup>803</sup> On the events of the 1999 and 2000 incursions, see especially: Cornell (2005b); Naumkin (2005), 89-96; Makarenko (2002).

of the narcotics trade in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>804</sup> Accounts supportive of this theory invariably note that the IMU controlled 70 per cent of the narcotics trade into Kyrgyzstan, despite the fact that there is no data to support this assertion other than a singular comment made by one Kyrgyz counternarcotics official.<sup>805</sup> Whilst it is likely that the IMU were engaged to some extent in the narcotics trade, it is not clear how the incursions would have been useful for this endeavour, as they drew a phenomenal amount of attention and military personnel to an area that had previously been largely ignored and thus easily transited. Moreover, as noted by Crisis Group, if the IMU really had controlled such a large share of the drugs trade, they would have enjoyed extremely large revenue flows and thus would have undoubtedly been able to field a stronger and more capable force.<sup>806</sup> More likely is the assessment of the UNODC, which considers the IMU and other armed groups to have a symbiotic relationship with locally based narco-traffickers – based on shared requirements for funds, arms, and covert cross-border activity – but with organised crime figures reaping most of the profits of the trade.<sup>807</sup>

Once in northern Afghanistan, the IMU became a key source of armed support for the Taliban regime in its ongoing efforts to eliminate the Northern Alliance.<sup>808</sup> However, this brief success came to an end quickly, as the US/NATO campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in late 2001 virtually eliminated the IMU as a group (and killed its most successful figure, Namangani). The small number of remaining IMU militants (including Yuldashev) relocated to Waziristan, in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These years in Pakistan are largely opaque, but it is believed that the IMU used its Al Qaeda/Taliban connections to maintain this sanctuary and gradually reconstitute itself, garnering new recruits as Central Asian regimes expelled Islamists who then migrated to FATA training camps. IMU militants participated in local armed clashes in South Waziristan, sometimes acting as mercenaries for Taliban and Al Qaeda groups, but Pakistani offensives against FATA militants in 2009 appear to have dispersed many of the IMU militants back into Afghanistan.<sup>809</sup>

The IMU and its splinter groups remained the prime culprits of terrorist activity in Central Asia. In 2004, a supposed IMU splinter group claimed responsibility for several bombings in Uzbekistan. By 2006, there were reports of an IMU resurgence in Ferghana, and by 2009 it

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<sup>804</sup> For favourable accounts of this theory, see Engvall (2006), 837; Jackson (2005), 45; Cornell (2005b), 629; Makarenko (2002); Madi (2004).

<sup>805</sup> For a critique of this theory, see De Danieli (2011), 130; UNODC (2007), 34; Paoli (2007), 973; Williams (2003), 103.

<sup>806</sup> ICG (2001c), 5.

<sup>807</sup> UNODC (2010), 110. Local experts also indicated that political interests may drive claims of connections between militants and narco-trafficking. Interview (UNODC), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>808</sup> Weitz (2004), 507; Cornell and Spector (2001), 199; Lewis (2008), 189-90; ICG (2001c), 3; Sanderson, et al. (2010), 7.

<sup>809</sup> Sanderson, et al. (2010), 14-15; RFE/RL, 6/8/09; RFE/RL, 9/6/11.

appeared that the group was operating again in northern Afghanistan and eastern Tajikistan.<sup>810</sup> The Islamic Jihad Union, a radical splinter group, was blamed in 2009 for terrorist acts in Uzbekistan and terrorist plots in Germany. The first suicide bombing in Tajikistan, in Khujand in September 2010, was claimed by Jamaat Ansarullah, an apparent IMU splinter group. The Tajik government claimed to have intercepted and killed dozens of IMU infiltrators at its borders.<sup>811</sup>

However, the precise nature of the IMU in its post-2001 incarnation – including its size and capacity and whether it is truly behind the violent acts attributed to it – remains extremely murky. As noted earlier, the Central Asian regimes have a sizable incentive to attribute non-state armed violence to terrorists, obscuring the significant amount of violence engendered by domestic political or criminal rivals. At the same time, small and weak militant groups have an incentive to claim responsibility for violent acts and thus raise their profile. In short, there are structural conditions within the Tajik system that facilitate an exaggeration of the terrorist threat. To this must be added uncertainties stemming from the Afghan context, in which any non-Pashtuns fighting alongside the Taliban are labelled as IMU, further inflating IMU numbers.<sup>812</sup>

It is clear, however, that militant jihadist groups are operating in Tajikistan and Central Asia, even if their size and capacity are unknowable at the present time. They do not pose an existential threat to the Tajik regime, despite the latter's relatively weak security sector. Instead, the IMU and its splinter groups threaten the state in the manner that terrorist groups typically do: 1) they generate instability, which within the greater context of socioeconomic grievances can be exploited by regime opponents; and 2) they provoke the regime into overly harsh retaliation, thus legitimising the IMU narrative of tyranny and repression and facilitating an escalatory cycle of violence.<sup>813</sup> The actual number of attacks and deaths attributable to Islamist terrorists in Tajikistan remains very small, and yet they have succeeded in being put at the front of the Tajik regime's security agenda.

As any number of analysts have pointed out, however, the persistence of the IMU in Tajikistan is 'a symptom of instability rather than its cause'.<sup>814</sup> In other words, whilst the IMU does contribute to domestic insecurity, the far more pertinent causality is that linking the country's

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<sup>810</sup> US Department of State (2010), 2; IWPR, 26/5/06(a); IWPR, 3/10/06; IWPR, 4/1/07; IWPR, 23/7/09; IWPR, 12/10/09; RFE/RL, 8/12/10.

<sup>811</sup> RFE/RL, 6/12/10; RFE/RL, 18/1/11.

<sup>812</sup> Giustozzi (2010); Bleuer (2012), 3.

<sup>813</sup> Sanderson, et al. (2010), 21; ICG (2001c), 4; IWPR, 18/11/09; IWPR, 23/4/11.

<sup>814</sup> IWPR, 4/1/07; Sanderson, et al. (2010).

political and economic instability – driven by repression, corruption and poverty – and the continued existence of terrorist groups.

### **7.2.2 Islamic Extremists: Hizb-ut-Tahrir**

The IMU is not the only form of Islamic extremism of concern to the Tajik regime. In the postwar era, the Rahmon regime has increasingly targeted non-violent Islamist movements, demonstrating that it is concerned not only with violent behaviour but the fundamental ideologies of such groups. Having permitted the continued participation in politics of Central Asia's only Islamist party – the IRP – the regime is unwilling to allow any further manifestations of Islamist political activism, and has increasingly monitored and restricted religious practices (for example, ordering the return of Tajik students from foreign madrassahs, installing surveillance cameras inside mosques, dictating sermon topics to imams, and closing mosques of concern).<sup>815</sup> The Tajik population has not mounted serious resistance to these measures, in part because of a continued scepticism regarding Islamist politics (a pre-war tendency that was only exacerbated by the sectarian aspects of the civil war).<sup>816</sup>

The regime's prime target is Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), an international Islamist activist movement that began making inroads into Central Asia in the mid-1990s, particularly in Uzbekistan.<sup>817</sup> Founded in Jerusalem in the 1950s, HT utilises missionaries and an ideology of non-violent pursuit of socio-political change in the hopes of creating a new pan-Islamic caliphate throughout the modern Muslim world. A large part of its successful global transmission is the translation of this overarching goal into local contexts: in Central Asia, it focuses on toppling the existing autocratic regimes and creating an Islamic emirate in the region. In Tajikistan, its followers are drawn heavily from the Uzbek communities in the northern districts and around Dushanbe, in particular impoverished young men. The enduring poverty and deprivation in Tajikistan, juxtaposed against official corruption and openly flaunted ill-gotten wealth, have facilitated the emergence of grievances amongst the population and thus the appeal of ideologies promoting a sense of social justice.<sup>818</sup> (Disenchantment with the IRP also fuels the attraction to HT amongst devout Tajiks.) Some suggest that the HT has additional appeal in

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<sup>815</sup> US State Department (2009); RFE/RL, 10/1/11; Central Asia Online, 3/4/12.

<sup>816</sup> Akiner (2001), 66; Lewis (2008), 203; Bowyer (2008), 14-15.

<sup>817</sup> Two additional targets are Tajik Salafists and the missionary group Tabligh Jamaat; non-Islamic groups have also been repressed, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists. US Commission on International Religious Freedom (2012).

<sup>818</sup> Akiner (2001), 69; Karagiannis (2006); Collins (2007), 81; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 18; OSCE (2009); RFE/RL, 18/1/11.

Tajikistan due to its message of non-violent struggle, given the enduring societal trauma created by the civil war.<sup>819</sup>

Despite its supposed adherence to non-violence, HT is considered a major threat by the Tajik regime. Whilst the chances of HT actually overthrowing the regime and creating an Islamic state in Tajikistan are virtually nil, the regime continues to take a hard-line approach to the movement (as do many other countries – including the UK – who consider HT to be a ‘gateway’ to more violent groups such as Al Qaeda). The Tajik regime rejects HT claims of non-violence, often attributing violent acts to its members and insisting that it cooperates directly with the IMU.<sup>820</sup> HT has been banned within Tajikistan since 2001 and hundreds of its members have been imprisoned for plotting terrorist acts or proselytizing extremist literature.<sup>821</sup> However, as noted by the US State Department, many observers suspect the regime of using ‘HT or extremist labels to harass opponents, extort favors or financial benefits, or otherwise intimidate rural populations’.<sup>822</sup> Local experts suggest that hard-line government repression actually enhances the appeal of HT, thereby ensuring its continued presence even whilst managing to contain the activities of its members.<sup>823</sup>

### 7.2.3 Local Warlords

The Tajik government has been fond of ascribing terrorist connections to local militants and warlords, in order to reduce their claims to legitimacy, excuse heavy government responses, and build up the terrorist threat confronting the state. Nevertheless, the Tajik commanders who resisted government control, relying upon their own security forces and local sources of authority, generally had aims and activities distinct from the largely foreign terrorist cadres plotting to overthrow Central Asian regimes.

The literature on intrastate conflict includes many attempts to grapple with the ‘warlord’ phenomenon.<sup>824</sup> Many conventional definitions are unsuitable for the purposes of this discussion, as they locate warlords in a fixed context of state collapse (excluding evolving and diverse state conditions) and presume a primacy of self-interest in warlord behaviour, neglecting the extent to which they act as protectors of their local communities (and thus acquire more legitimacy than the common conception of ‘warlord’). Both of these aspects are

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<sup>819</sup> Karagiannis (2006), 14; Collins (2007), 83.

<sup>820</sup> Bowyer (2008), 8; IWPR, 3/10/06; IWPR, 4/1/07; IWPR, 18/11/09.

<sup>821</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom (2012); Asia-Plus, 4/1/12.

<sup>822</sup> US State Department (2009). See also: US Commission on International Religious Freedom (2012).

<sup>823</sup> Interview (AUCA), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>824</sup> For the debate on ‘warlords’, see Robinson (2001); Mackinlay (1998); Nourzhanov (2005); Marten (2006); Reno (1998).

vital for understanding the warlord phenomenon in Tajikistan. Therefore, this section utilises a fairly broad understanding of 'warlord' as a sub-state actor operating with considerable local autonomy and authority within a given territory, under conditions of fragmented central authority and a significant privatisation of the security function.

In Tajikistan's early postwar period, local warlords were pervasive and relatively powerful, given the dominance of non-state forces during the civil war and a central government that remained weak.<sup>825</sup> Generally, local warlords were men who had participated in the war as field commanders and/or had played a key role in the protection of their local communities. They thus possessed arms, followers and access to illicit funding sources, which most were loathe to surrender following the peace deal – and in the end, few had to. Many field commanders retained their arms, followers and funds by virtue of being incorporated into the new political and security structures, whilst other local authority figures remained unchallenged due to the lack of government control over their regions. In both cases, they continued to exercise considerable local autonomy for a number of years, retaining the allegiance of fighters and constituents and their connections with fellow warlords. As noted by Nourzhanov, 'A warlord in Tajikistan is not a mere bandit or a selfish politician with an organised military force. A warlord is a protector and a provider who is accepted by a community under pressure from unrepresentative government as a legitimate leader'.<sup>826</sup> (At the same time, it should be noted that some former commanders generated popular discontent for their 'selfish' behaviour in the postwar years.<sup>827</sup>)

The majority of local warlords were in effect co-opted by the government gradually over the course of about five years following the end of the war. Whilst continuing to pursue their own interests locally (including illicit interests, such as narco-trafficking), they by and large acceded to the government's mandate and did not challenge the regime politically. This process of warlord neutralisation was, in fact, a key element of stabilisation and peace-building following the end of the conflict, as the pacification and reintegration into society of such conflict actors was necessary for future stability – even if obtained not through genuine reconciliation, but by essentially 'buying off' potential opponents with profitable positions and the spoils of war.<sup>828</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Nourzhanov (2005); ICG (2001a), 13, 16-18. The situation in Tajikistan thus conformed to the now-accepted view among many scholars that a lack of central government control does not necessarily indicate a lack of governance; see Menkhaus (2010), 182-85.

<sup>826</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 126. See also Torjesen and MacFarlane (2007), 318-19.

<sup>827</sup> Torjesen, et al. (2005), 13.

<sup>828</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 34-35; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 53-54; De Danieli (2011), 140. On the 'corruption buys peace' argument, see Le Billon (2003).



However, there was also a ‘spoiler’ category of local warlords: those who rejected the peace agreement outright. They were relatively small in number, indicating the general success of the co-optation approach pursued by the regime. One of the most notable was Colonel Khudoberdyev, reflecting general Uzbek dissatisfaction with the agreement as well as his previous experiences challenging the regime successfully.<sup>829</sup> He joined an unsuccessful coup attempt in August 1997, then went into exile in Uzbekistan on the condition that his brigade and his constituents would not be harmed. However, this agreement was violated when the forces of another former field commander, Suhrob Kasimov, proceeded into Kurgan-Tyube and selectively targeted Uzbeks for retribution, reportedly beating, raping and executing a number of people.<sup>830</sup> In November 1998, Khudoberdyev invaded Leninabad from Uzbekistan and briefly took control of parts of the city of Khujand. Again his rebellion was put down, and he retreated once more to Uzbekistan.<sup>831</sup> Several hundred people were killed, including civilian bystanders.<sup>832</sup> Khudoberdyev was most likely killed in Tashkent in 2001, but the circumstances of his death are murky, engendering rumours over the years that he is still alive and still plotting to unseat Rahmon.<sup>833</sup>

The failure of the powerful Khudoberdyev, as well as a handful of other spoilers, to derail the post-conflict political arrangements augured well for the regime’s co-optation approach. Most observers judge that by 2001-2002, most warlords and former field commanders had been successfully co-opted or at least contained.<sup>834</sup> In this way, the central government was able to slowly erode the hyper-localisation of authority and politics that had taken root during the anarchic conditions of the civil war (although even today, local and informal systems of governance remain strong in many areas of Tajikistan, and former warlords are key actors within them).<sup>835</sup>

Over time, as Rahmon grew in strength, he was able to remove co-opted warlords from the regime if they became too powerful or difficult. They were often replaced by Kulyabi allies. For example, Ghaffor Mirzoyev, one of the most powerful former PFT commanders due to his leadership of the Presidential Guard and significant criminal enterprises, was arrested for

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<sup>829</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 56; BBC/Voice of Free Tajikistan, 19/6/97.

<sup>830</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 123; Lubin, et al. (1999), 52.

<sup>831</sup> Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 56; Nourzhanov (2005), 124.

<sup>832</sup> Lubin (1999), 52.

<sup>833</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 130; ICG (2001a), 18. See ICG (2009), 17, for an example of too much credence placed in such rumours.

<sup>834</sup> Tadjbakhsh (2008), 35; Torjesen, et al. (2005); Heathershaw (2011), 1; Jonson (2006), 48; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 15.

<sup>835</sup> Akiner (2001), 66, 72; Wiegmann (2009).

treason and murder in 2004 and sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>836</sup> (He was replaced by another former PFT commander from the president's hometown of Danghara.) Many of the UTO commanders who joined the reconciliation government and security forces were also gradually forced out between 2001 and 2007; one of the last was Mirzo Ziyoyev, who returned to Tavildara in 2006.<sup>837</sup> Ten years after the peace agreement, Tajik political and economic elites were more likely to be oligarchs and corrupt officials affiliated to Rahmon than former field commanders.<sup>838</sup>

However, the relative quiescence of local power brokers in eastern Tajikistan has been broken several times in recent years, with serious confrontations between government forces and local warlords and militants in 2008 (Gharm), 2010 (Rasht Valley) and 2012 (Khorog).<sup>839</sup> Government operations have eliminated many militants, yet the regime has also frequently had to rely on deals with local warlords to restore stability (as when it arranged for Mirzokhuja Akhmadov, in the Rasht Valley, to track down and kill Mullo Abdullo in 2010-11).<sup>840</sup>

These events demonstrate several key facts with respect to the security threat posed by local warlords. First, the Rasht and Tavildara valleys are not wholly and reliably controlled by the central government. Local authority figures in eastern Tajikistan might hold government positions and refrain from openly challenging the regime, but the government cannot assume it can exercise its will in the region.<sup>841</sup> Even fifteen years after the end of the war the Tajik government must make deals with local commanders instead of directly exercising its authority. Thus, recent events must be taken as a corrective to the more optimistic interpretations of Tajik security from earlier in the decade.

Second, it is apparent that local commanders in eastern Tajikistan are still capable of mobilising fighters and arms. As noted by Roche and Heathershaw, in discussing the 2010 clashes in the Rasht Valley:

*The loyalty to the leader was such that former fighters agreed that they would go back to the mountains if their leaders should call them. This does*

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<sup>836</sup> Nourzhanov (2005), 120; Matveeva (2009), 26; Markowitz (2010), 168; Wiegmann (2009), 136; Nakaya (2009), 269; Lewis (2008), 173; IWPR, 21/2/05.

<sup>837</sup> ICG (2011), 2.

<sup>838</sup> Nakaya (2009); Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 60; Lewis (2008), 173-76; ICG (2009), 3-4; IWPR, 17/6/08; IWPR, 31/7/09.

<sup>839</sup> For details on these events, see: US Department of State (2010), 2; Roche and Heathershaw (2010a); ICG (2011); IWPR, 23/7/09; IWPR, 31/7/09; RFE/RL, 6/8/09; IWPR, 4/10/10; IWPR, 5/5/11; Reuters, 24/7/12; RFE/RL, 26/7/12.

<sup>840</sup> ICG (2011), 9; IWPR, 5/5/11.

<sup>841</sup> US Department of State (2010), 2; De Danieli (2011), 132; ICG (2009), 6-7; Sanderson, et al. (2010), 11; IWPR, 5/5/11.

*not mean that they were waiting for another opportunity to fight. More that they felt they had laid down weapons collectively and voluntarily, rather than been defeated. Such fighters feel dishonoured and threatened when government troops enter Kamarob for conscription and security purposes. Such exercises of central power challenge local people's sense of sovereignty.*<sup>842</sup>

Further, infiltration routes from Afghanistan are still apparently in operation. Taken together, this indicates that the low-level threat that currently exists has the potential to continue in the future, and possibly escalate. At the same time, it must be noted that most former opposition field commanders have now been eliminated, and the authority and connections acquired by militiamen during the civil war are fading year by year.

In short, the continued existence of alternative authority figures in eastern Tajikistan undercuts one of the key tenets of modern statehood: the regime's monopoly of force within its borders. Whilst a strategy of tolerating and negotiating with local authorities on the periphery of the state may indeed be a rational choice for a weak regime, it is a complex and risky strategy that may not prove sustainable over the long term.<sup>843</sup> Local warlords in eastern Tajikistan are unlikely to depose the regime or launch a secessionist movement, but they generate continued instability whilst also sitting astride the vast flow of narcotics – and potential flows of militants – that traverse Tajikistan. They thus represent a critical, if currently mostly latent, security threat to the state.

#### **7.2.4 Narco-trafficking**

The expansion of the drugs trade within Tajikistan during the civil war (described in Section 4.3.2.) was not curtailed with the peace agreement; if anything, the reintegration of opposition militias steeped in the narcotics business served to embed the industry within military and government structures.<sup>844</sup> The official cessation of hostilities also facilitated the expansion of drug routes and the consolidation of trafficking networks. The return of refugees, in need of new sources of income and often having useful knowledge of cross-border routes and connections, provided a large labour pool of smugglers, and production in Afghanistan was booming. The removal of Russian border forces from the Tajik-Afghan border in 2005 also apparently increased trafficking volumes, as their Tajik replacements were poorly paid and

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<sup>842</sup> Roche and Heathershaw (2010b).

<sup>843</sup> On the 'mediated state' model, see Menkhaus (2010).

<sup>844</sup> Engvall (2006), 845; ICG (2001b), 15.

trained and highly corrupt.<sup>845</sup> Much of the remote segment of the border in Badakhshan remains effectively unguarded.<sup>846</sup> Narco-trafficking and its associated violence and corruption have infected the Tajik security forces and border regions, whilst also providing an economic basis for local militants and warlords. Some have gone as far as to call Tajikistan a 'narco-state', demonstrating the pervasiveness of the drugs trade in the Tajik state and society.<sup>847</sup>

Because interdiction rates are believed to be so low – from 2 to 10 per cent – it is difficult to estimate the size of the drug flow through Tajikistan.<sup>848</sup> The UNODC estimates that up to 100 tonnes of heroin – representing 20 per cent of Afghan production – transit Tajikistan each year, in addition to hundreds of additional tonnes of opium and cannabis.<sup>849</sup> Estimates of net profits from the drugs trade range from several hundred million to two billion dollars, an amount equivalent to 40 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP.<sup>850</sup> In essence, 'the trafficking route is the country's most valuable resource'.<sup>851</sup>

There have been several major changes in the drugs trade in the postwar era. First, the number and location of transit routes has evolved. For example, whilst during the 1990s the primary trafficking route between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan followed the Khorog-Osh highway, government counter-operations around Osh meant that by 2003 there appeared to be four major routes and more than a hundred smaller paths bringing drugs into Kyrgyzstan.<sup>852</sup> Some of these routes were laid upon the paths taken by Tajik refugees during the war.<sup>853</sup> Additional routes have also developed through northern Tajikistan, as shown in the map below. Finally, the growing organisation and official protection of the drugs trade appears to have funnelled transit routes through southern Tajikistan onto well-travelled highways and border crossings, as the low risk of interdiction – thanks to corruption – means that small, covert pathways are no longer as vital.<sup>854</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 116-17; UNODC (2010), 114; Interview (EU-BOMBAF), Dushanbe, 2008; Interview (UNODC), Dushanbe, 2008.

<sup>846</sup> US Department of State (2012).

<sup>847</sup> Paoli (2007); Cornell (2005b), 623; ICG (2011), 17.

<sup>848</sup> UNODC experts in the region proved reluctant to even guess at the share of interdicted drugs. Interview (UNODC), Bishkek, 2008; Interview (UNODC), Dushanbe, 2008.

<sup>849</sup> UNODC (2010); US Department of State (2010).

<sup>850</sup> De Danieli (2011), 132; *Economist*, 21/4/12.

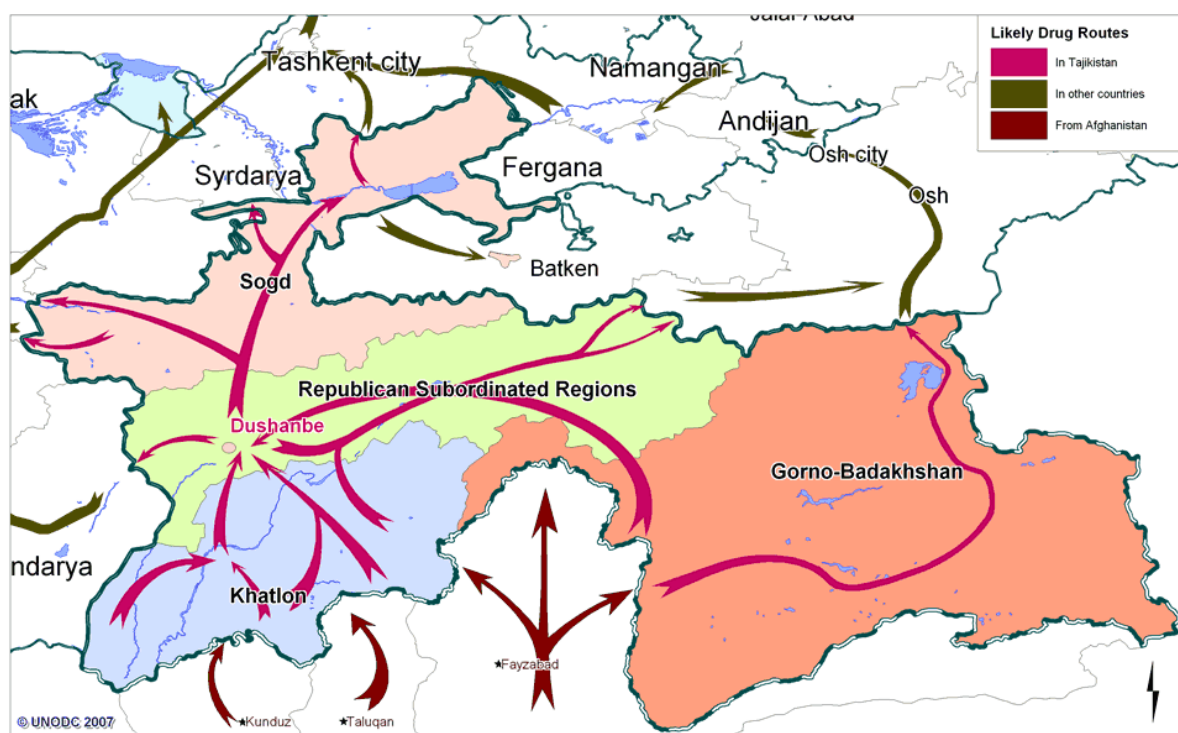
<sup>851</sup> *Economist*, 21/4/12.

<sup>852</sup> UNODC (2007), 33-34; ICG (2001b), 2.

<sup>853</sup> Cornell (2005b), 630; Madi (2004), 260.

<sup>854</sup> UNODC (2010), 115; Jackson (2005), 41; ICG (2011), 17.

**Map 7.1. Narco-Trafficking Routes Through Tajikistan, 2007 (UNODC)<sup>855</sup>**



The second major change involves the composition of trafficked drugs. Of the 4,000 kg of drugs seized in Tajikistan in 2011, opium and heroin comprised only 24 percent; cannabis (including hashish) made up the rest. The rise in the cannabis trade has been startling: it was not found at all within drug seizures in 1996, but made up 25 per cent in 2005 and 52 per cent in 2009.<sup>856</sup> The reasons for this shift can be found within the dynamics of drug production in Afghanistan, where cannabis production has skyrocketed: compared to opium, cannabis is less likely to be targeted for eradication, is less labour-intensive, requires no precursor chemicals for processing, and is still highly profitable.<sup>857</sup>

Third, with regard to the networks controlling the drugs trade, there has been a significant shift from the war years, when the narcotics industry was relatively open, freely structured and entrepreneurial. Today, the drugs industry is controlled by a smaller number of more structured organisations (perhaps 10-20), often rooted in solidarity group networks and operating under the protection of senior regime officials and the police forces.<sup>858</sup> (This protection is evidenced in the fact that large seizures are increasingly reported, indicating that

<sup>855</sup> Accessed 24/3/12 at: <http://dbroca.uz/gallery/displayimage.php?album=8&pos=1>

<sup>856</sup> Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 8.

<sup>857</sup> Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 8. See also: UNODC (2011).

<sup>858</sup> Paoli, et al. (2007), 967; Wiegmann (2009), 113; ICG (2001a), 19; UNODC (2010), 116; Latypov (2011); Interview (EU-BOMCA), Dushanbe, 2008.

‘traffickers operate with a high confidence level’.<sup>859</sup>) It is generally believed that Rahmon himself is not directly involved in the drugs trade, but its corrupting influences extend throughout the highest levels of his regime and the security services.<sup>860</sup> Thus, the considerable efforts expended by domestic and international agencies to counter the narcotics trade are resisted by players who also exert considerable power and influence. In some cases, counternarcotics efforts are actually used by corrupt officials to target rival elites and networks.

The drugs trade represents several obvious security challenges for Tajikistan. Its scale and profitability generate a host of additional criminal activities, including extortion and money laundering, as well as solid systems of corruption in the political and security sectors. (It should be noted, however, that high levels of competitive violence – i.e., ‘turf wars’, such as those plaguing Mexico today – are not associated with the Tajik trade; only a small percentage of the overall crime rate is officially attributed to narco-trafficking.<sup>861</sup>) Whilst enriching corrupt officials, the drugs trade subverts the institutions and key functionalities of the state: the security services are weak, the formal economy stagnant, and the rule of law moribund, thus raising significant questions as to the long-term viability of the state.<sup>862</sup> The proceeds of narco-trafficking enrich non-state armed groups, further eroding government authority. Narco-trafficking also victimises Tajiks living near transit routes, especially along the border: whilst many impoverished Tajiks willingly participate in drugs smuggling, some living in the border regions are forced by Afghan traffickers to become couriers, with family members beaten or kidnapped to ensure compliance. Afghan drug traffickers also reportedly engage in kidnapping-for-ransom and robbery of local civilians.<sup>863</sup> This sort of victimisation also extends to the border forces, many of whom collaborate in the drugs trade not solely on the basis of bribes but because of the fear of retribution to themselves or their families.<sup>864</sup>

The threat from narco-trafficking is unlikely to subside in the near term, given continued production in Afghanistan and the difficulties in halting the cross-border traffic.<sup>865</sup>

Afghanistan’s drug economy is deeply and structurally embedded in that country’s political,

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<sup>859</sup> Williams (2003), 86; UNODC (2010), 115.

<sup>860</sup> US Department of State (2010), 3; Akiner (2001), 75; Williams (2003), 85; Paoli, et al. (2007), 954. Several interviewees in Dushanbe stated that Rahmon did not need to become involved in the drugs trade given his considerable personal wealth via corruption in the aluminium industry.

<sup>861</sup> Drug offences comprised only 5.5 per cent of the overall crime rate in 2011, according to official sources; whilst such crime figures are not wholly authoritative, the general trend is backed up by authoritative observers on the ground. Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 5; US Department of State (2010), 3; Torjesen, et al. (2005), 29.

<sup>862</sup> Lubin, et al. (1999), 71-72; UNODC (2007), 33; ICG (2001b); Interview (UNODC), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>863</sup> UNODC (2007), 22; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 12; Torjesen, et al. (2005), 40; Williams (2003), 85; Wiegmann (2009), 114; RFE/RL, 14/7/11; IWPR, 22/4/09; Interview (EU-BOMBAF), Dushanbe, 2008.

<sup>864</sup> Torjesen, et al. (2005), 43; ICG (2001b), 15; Makarenko (2002), 13.

<sup>865</sup> UNODC (2010), 112; Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 16-20.

economic and social systems. To date, counternarcotics programmes have not addressed the fundamental drivers of the drug economy, and they are unlikely to do so in the near term, given the many benefits accruing to both powerful political and military figures and thousands of rural civilians.<sup>866</sup> Within Tajikistan, the greater reach and capacity of the counternarcotics sector seems to have had as its major impact thus far an increase in the opportunities for corruption and profit-making (for example, more checkpoints and more police increase the number of people and locales for bribery).<sup>867</sup> Thus, Tajikistan should expect to have to deal with the trade in opium and cannabis for the foreseeable future, regardless of the nature of the post-ISAF regime in Afghanistan.

### **7.2.5 Organised Crime**

The narcotics trade receives most of the attention in Tajikistan, but this should not obscure the many other forms of organised criminality that occur within its borders. Organised crime groups engage in robbery, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, smuggling, prostitution and other illicit activities, generally facilitated by hefty levels of corruption. As noted earlier, organised crime is now routinely considered an internal security threat when it facilitates actors and conditions that threaten the continued existence of the regime and impose significant harm upon the civilian population. Organised crime poses a security threat due to its use by terrorists and insurgents to fund their anti-government activities as well as the violence and instability that permeates border regions due to cross-border illicit flows (including armed clashes with border security forces).<sup>868</sup> It also corrupts state security forces, leaving them unable or unwilling to confront the broad array of security threats facing the nation.<sup>869</sup> More broadly, organised crime contributes to what the UNODC calls the 'insidious erosion of state control' by stimulating the creation and maintenance of parallel power structures that are unaccountable, undemocratic and unconcerned with the welfare of the state and its citizens.<sup>870</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Felbab-Brown (2006).

<sup>867</sup> IGC (2001b), ii; Latypov (2011); De Danieli (2011).

<sup>868</sup> Makarenko (2002), 10; UNODC (2007), 33; McMullin (2009), 94.

<sup>869</sup> Galeotti (2001).

<sup>870</sup> UNODC (2010), 36. See also Williams (2003), 79.

| Table 7.1. Typology of Central Asian Criminal Groups (UNODC, 2007) <sup>871</sup> |                     |                                                                                                                          |                                                                       |                                                       |                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | Size                | Structure and Hierarchy                                                                                                  | Connections                                                           | Modus operandi                                        | Activities                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Criminal group</b>                                                             | 2-10                | 2-3 levels of Hierarchy                                                                                                  | Links to corrupt law enforcement                                      | Predatory Behaviour                                   | Robbery<br>Kidnapping<br>Extortion<br>Contract killings                                                                              |
| <b>Criminal groupings</b>                                                         | > 10                | Structured as trade unions                                                                                               | Links to corrupt law enforcement                                      | Less violent than others                              | Production<br>Bank fraud<br>Gambling<br>Drug trafficking                                                                             |
| <b>Criminal syndicate</b>                                                         | > 20                | Structured within organised criminal communities                                                                         | Symbiotic relationship with state agencies                            | Highly organised, sophisticated                       | Theft of state property<br>Smuggling<br>Fraud<br>Control of prostitution<br>Control of drugs trade                                   |
| <b>Criminal cartel</b>                                                            | > 50                | Hierarchical structure with several leaders who coordinate spheres of influence                                          | Symbiotic relationship with state elites; links with foreign partners | Sophisticated version of syndicates                   | Bank fraud<br>Money laundering<br>Diversion of aid<br>Energy sector                                                                  |
| <b>Politically oriented or ethnic criminal communities</b>                        | Varies, likely > 20 | Well organised political structure, with administrative organisation, local representatives, and private security forces | Parallel structures between legitimate and shadow operators           | Especially active during civil war or ethnic conflict | Subversion<br>Rebellion<br>Terrorism<br>Contract killings<br>Organisation of riots<br>Drugs and arms trafficking<br>Ethnic cleansing |

Table 7.1, formulated by the UNODC, presents the types of organised crime groups active in Central Asia and the activities they engage in; it is based on an analysis of organised crime groups in Tajikistan. Interestingly, Tajik criminal groups tend toward the larger and more organised end of the spectrum, compared to other Central Asian countries, partly due to the

<sup>871</sup> UNODC (2007), 27-28.



mobilisation of non-state militias during the civil war. It should be noted that in many areas, there is often a distinct separation between groups involved in the drugs trade and groups engaged in other forms of criminality.<sup>872</sup>

The chart demonstrates the wide range of criminal activities in Tajikistan and the corrupt structures of governance that they promote. As noted by Akiner:

*In the past, prospective Tajik leaders lobbied Moscow for backing. Today, it is the criminal world within Tajikistan that provides support for would-be political actors... The black market trade in Tajikistan's main exports – aluminium, cotton and gold – produces huge wealth and has virtually acquired institutional status. Politicians, bureaucrats and warlords alike are involved, bound together by powerful client-patron linkages.*<sup>873</sup>

Organised crime actors and their corrupt partners are a key factor in the ongoing weak governance and diffuse security functions present within the country. Their activities not only undermine good governance and security, but actually require weak governance in order to sustain high levels of illicit wealth creation and the patronage networks that provide status and funding. Thus, the convergence of interests between corrupt state officials and criminal networks has actually generated an ongoing form of stability within the country. As noted by Wiegmann, a 'weak but stable' state is not necessarily an unfortunate turn of events for a regime but can be something actively and rationally sought by elites eager to maintain their profitable status quo.<sup>874</sup> In this, Tajikistan follows the example of many other countries (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa) in which corruption's ubiquity and utility for maintaining reciprocity within and amongst the patronage networks that structure the state gives it a measure of legitimacy, and thus it becomes an 'informal code of conduct' rather than a force for destabilising the political order.<sup>875</sup>

In this sense, organised crime is not currently a direct threat to the regime, but rather a symbiotic partner. In the long term, however, the corrupting influence of organised crime and its enervating effects on economic performance and social wellbeing represent a significant threat to the continued functioning of the state.<sup>876</sup> Organised crime subverts the potential for

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<sup>872</sup> Interview (UNODC), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>873</sup> Akiner (2001), 74.

<sup>874</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 25-27. See also Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 54-55; UNODC (2007), 11; *Economist*, 21/4/12.

<sup>875</sup> Le Billon (2003), 415.

<sup>876</sup> McMullin (2009), 95; Torjesen and MacFarlane (2009), 62; Hazen (2010); ICG (2001a), 14.

legitimate and profitable economic activity, reducing the ability of the state to fund its functioning via taxation as well as impoverishing the civilian population. In Tajikistan, organised crime actors are not merely concerned with profit via trade in illicit goods and services; they actually control or influence much of the licit economic sector as well, including its most profitable activities (notably, the export of aluminium and cotton).<sup>877</sup> Organised crime is a key factor driving continued non-democratic rule in Tajikistan, as the transparency and accountability associated with democracy would limit the ability of corrupt officials to acquire illicit wealth. Finally, a severe political or economic shock, or renewed competition between political actors, could not be absorbed by a state hollowed out in service to the personal greed of corrupt officials and their clients. For all these reasons, organised crime represents not just a socioeconomic or legal problem but a key security threat.

### **7.3 Internal Threats: Societal**

Contrary to stronger, more stable states, a very real objective for regimes in weak states is simply maintaining their hold on power and – in extreme cases – the very existence of the state. In such cases, anything that threatens the continued functioning of the state can reasonably be perceived as a security threat, in a way that does not hold true for stronger states.<sup>878</sup> Poverty, for example, can be alleviated and contained in developed states, but its typical pervasiveness and unequal distribution in weak states can generate challenges to central governance as well as grievances leading to political unrest. Societal threats create an environment of instability and victimisation that facilitates grievance formation and can be exploited by the kinds of non-state actors considered in the previous section.

From this perspective, Tajikistan has suffered from a number of internal security threats at the societal level in the postwar era. This section considers these from the perspective of the Tajik population itself, as illustrated in several key public opinion surveys. This facilitates a human security perspective that is useful in considering not only the levels of ongoing civilian suffering in the postwar era, but the likely sources of grievance and potential instability going forward.

One very interesting study from the OSCE Counter Terrorism and Police Unit in Tajikistan, conducted in 2009, reveals a number of key insights.<sup>879</sup> A series of focus groups in Kurgan-Tyube, Shaartuz, Kulyab, Khujand, Dushanbe and Khorog identified the top ‘security concerns’ of diverse groups of local residents. For the most part, their top concerns were not those

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<sup>877</sup> Williams (2003), 79.

<sup>878</sup> Engvall (2006), 830.

<sup>879</sup> OSCE (2009).

already discussed in this chapter, but focused on the leading challenges faced by Tajik society and their potential ill effects for Tajik security. Table 7.2 consolidates the focus group results:

| <b>Table 7.2. Focus Group Security Concerns by Region (OSCE, 2009)</b>                       |                                                                             |                                                                                                            |                                                          |                                                                                              |                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Kurgan-Tyube</b>                                                                          | <b>Shaartuz</b>                                                             | <b>Kulyab</b>                                                                                              | <b>Khujand</b>                                           | <b>Dushanbe</b>                                                                              | <b>Khorog</b>                                                      |
| 1. Return of migrant workers<br>2. Government corruption<br>3. 'Brain drain'<br>4. Extremism | 1. Government corruption<br>2. Return of migrant workers<br>3. Unemployment | 1. Government corruption<br>2. Unemployment<br>3. Disconnect between government and people<br>4. Extremism | 1. Government corruption<br>2. Return of migrant workers | 1. Economic crisis<br>2. Corruption<br>3. Civil war<br>4. Illiteracy/low levels of education | 1. Narcotics<br>2. Economic crisis<br>3. Return of migrant workers |

The focus groups revealed that people perceived security threats as emanating not directly from terrorists, militants, narco-traffickers or neighbouring states, but from the conditions that could drive such actors toward more threatening behaviour. For example, a common theme was the fear that a large-scale return of migrant workers, in the context of economic crisis and government corruption, would generate higher levels of crime and extremism. (An exception was Khorog, where narcotics were directly mentioned – unsurprisingly, given the city's leading role in the transit of drugs and the corruption of its border forces.) This focus on drivers has been backed up by other polls, notably those conducted by IFES and the Sharq Center.<sup>880</sup> Therefore, this section briefly addresses three key issues consistently raised by Tajiks as current security threats: migration, corruption and economic crisis. (Note that drugs and extremism are also cited in such surveys, but have been addressed in previous sections.)

### **7.3.1 Migrant Workers**

Perhaps the most dominant structural factor in the postwar Tajik political economy has been the out-migration of up to 1 million Tajiks per year – or 15 per cent of the population – to Russia and neighbouring states, primarily for the purpose of work.<sup>881</sup> The majority of these migrants are young men, and thus their absence from the country removes the primary constituency for criminality, militancy and social unrest, whilst also freeing the Tajik government from having to create jobs or social services for them. The remittances they send home constitute a large percentage of the Tajik GDP (42 per cent in 2010) and constitute one of the key sources of income for Tajik citizens (along with subsistence agriculture, barter, aid

<sup>880</sup> IFES (2004, 2010).

<sup>881</sup> IOM (2012), 13; Heathershaw (2011), 39; ICG (2001a), 22; ICG (2009), 10.

money, and illicit incomes).<sup>882</sup> In terms of the shadow economy, migrants also play a role in smuggling and trafficking activities in Central Asia and Russia; for example, 32 per cent of foreign nationals arrested for drug offences in Russia in 2011 were Tajik citizens.<sup>883</sup>

Tajik labour migration began in earnest during the later stages of the civil war, when Gharmi and Pamiri men left the country to avoid ethnic cleansing and to find some source of income. This process accelerated as they found that even with the subsiding of conflict, their home regions did not have enough economic activity to support them and they were limited in their ability to work in other regions of the country (according to Wiegmann, most Gharmis and Pamiris were not allowed to work outside their regions until 2004).<sup>884</sup> The scale of the out-migration can be seen in surveys from the early 2000s, which revealed that two-thirds of residents in the Rasht Valley were dependent on remittances from migrants working in Russia.<sup>885</sup> More recently, labour migration has also been driven by the desire of many young men to avoid compulsory military service, which features poor living conditions, low wages, and institutionalised hazing.<sup>886</sup>

In recent years, however, the global financial crisis and associated downturns (particularly in the Russian construction industry) has dampened the labour market for Tajik migrants and led to increased pressure within Russia to limit labour migration. Still, in early 2012, Russia estimated that there were 700,000 Tajik migrants residing in the country, or 10 per cent of the Tajik population.<sup>887</sup>

Should economic or political circumstances force the return of most migrants, many fear the impact on Tajikistan could be catastrophic. The Tajik economy cannot absorb their numbers, and the state cannot replace their income (estimated at nearly \$3 billion per year).<sup>888</sup> The presence of hundreds of thousands of unemployed young men in a corrupt and repressive state is a virtual recipe for political unrest and exploitation by non-state groups and extremist movements. Thus, the inherent instability and unsustainability of the migrant worker situation, and the grave threat it may someday pose to the continued functioning of the state, are perceived as a major threat in Tajikistan today.

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<sup>882</sup> World Bank, Tajikistan Country Brief, accessed 2/4/12 at: <http://www.worldbank.org/tj>. See also: Akiner (2009), 358; Wiegmann (2009), 49.

<sup>883</sup> Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 11; Marat (2006), 105; Paoli, et al. (2007), 958.

<sup>884</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 66.

<sup>885</sup> Ibid.

<sup>886</sup> EurasiaNet, 4/4/12.

<sup>887</sup> Reported in Al Jazeera, 3/4/12.

<sup>888</sup> IOM (2012), 13.

### 7.3.2 Corruption

Tajikistan is one of the most staunchly corrupt countries in the world: in 2011, it was ranked 152 of 182 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.<sup>889</sup>

Corruption is not limited to a single sector, industry or political faction but rather pervades every aspect of political, economic and social life in Tajikistan. It is frequently cited as the main obstacle to reform and progress in the postwar era.

A key driver of corruption within the security and police forces is low salaries, which are topped up by officers via bribes and extortion.<sup>890</sup> For example, in Dushanbe, I personally witnessed a police checkpoint in action: cars were frequently waved over, cash quickly changed hands, and then the motorist was sent on his way. (My experience thus correlated with the OSCE's field survey results that found, 'On a daily basis the average citizen can look out his or her window and see a law enforcement officer taking a bribe for a multitude of reasons or for no reason at all'.<sup>891</sup>) This kind of corruption can envelop entire security structures, especially at the border. For example, at the time of my visit to the Sher Khan Bandar crossing (on the Afghan border) in 2008, a gleaming new customs facility built with Western funds lay unused, whilst dozens of large lorries surrounded a small trailer, waiting – as I was told by a frequent border crosser – for the right official to show up and receive his bribes for not inspecting their contents. I was later informed by an international organisation employee that the main reason for the delay in using the new facility was a dispute as to which ministry should control it – not surprisingly, given the substantial revenue that can be generated at a major border crossing thanks to corruption.

Low salaries also drive another aspect of corruption in the security services: the payment of bribes to avoid compulsory military service. Brutal conditions in the barracks have made service so unpopular that temporary deferments are widely sought after – and thus, naturally, available for the right price. The combination of labour migration and corruption has left the Tajik state with so few available recruits that they have resorted to sweeps and press-ganging to fill the ranks of the army.<sup>892</sup>

The Tajik government is also heavily nepotistic, with Kulyabis continuing to dominate key government and economic posts (although Rahmon has broadened his strategic alliances with

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<sup>889</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, accessed 12/3/12 at: <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>

<sup>890</sup> US Department of State (2010), 1; US Department of State (2012); De Danieli (2011), 133; ICG (2001b), 15.

<sup>891</sup> OSCE (2009), 6.

<sup>892</sup> EurasiaNet, 4/4/12.

non-Kulyabis since the civil war era, partly in order to quell regional tensions and partly in response to new rivals from within his own Kulyabi political clan).<sup>893</sup> The continuing importance of patronage politics means that there are real-world consequences of this nepotism amongst the population, with those lacking connections effectively shut out of the political and economic spheres. Thus, corruption acts as a mechanism for the preservation of status quo inequality and the grievances it generates.<sup>894</sup>

This level of corruption represents a security threat because of the way in which it facilitates direct and indirect challenges to the state and victimisation of the population. It is the linchpin of the shadow economy and organised crime, including the narco-trafficking that has hollowed out state institutions and capacity, and thus of the non-state actors who rely upon illicit funding and connections to maintain their presence in the country.<sup>895</sup> It stymies economic growth and inhibits post-conflict development, thereby perpetuating the ill effects of poverty amongst the population. It creates concrete grievances: the 2010 IFES survey showed that 87 per cent of respondents considered corruption a serious problem and 58 per cent were dissatisfied with the government's attempts to address it.<sup>896</sup> The OSCE field surveys found that 'Corruption in the law enforcement agencies is widespread and very visible to the public. They know it is happening and they resent the fact that the government refuses to deal with the problem'.<sup>897</sup> Such grievances contribute to the appeal of extremist movements like HT, which are built on a foundation of social justice and anti-corruption, as well as more violent groups like the IMU.<sup>898</sup>

Corruption subverts the performance and legitimacy of official security forces, thus weakening the government response to security threats and encouraging the privatisation of the security function. It also leads to abuses of the civilian population, as people are forced to pay bribes for essential services or to avoid police harassment, or are coerced into participating in protection rackets. Finally, corruption amongst official and highly visible actors (such as government officials and police) encourages the spread of corruption through other sectors of society as well, as an impoverished population follows their example.<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Akiner (2001), 64-65; Akiner (2009), 370; ICG (2001a), 4.

<sup>894</sup> ICG (2001a), 14-15.

<sup>895</sup> U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2008).

<sup>896</sup> IFES (2010), p. 10-11. See also Le Billon (2003), 417-18.

<sup>897</sup> OSCE (2009), 5.

<sup>898</sup> Williams (2003), 72, 92; Lubin, et al. (1999), 68-69; RFE/RL, 9/6/11.

<sup>899</sup> OSCE (2009), 8.

### 7.3.3 Economic Crisis

Tajikistan's postwar economic performance has been less than impressive, a situation not improved by the current global financial crisis. Already the poorest of the Soviet republics, Tajikistan was devastated economically by the civil war, with an annual GDP in 1997 only 40 per cent of its 1991 levels.<sup>900</sup> Postwar economic growth rates have been positive, typically ranging from 5 to 10 per cent per year, but given the drastically low foundation from which they started, Tajikistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world: with a per capita income of \$862 in 2011, it is ranked 155 of 184 countries.<sup>901</sup> Whilst the number of people living in poverty has fallen considerably since the late 1990s, the World Bank states that 47 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line (2009 data), whilst 21.5 per cent of the Tajik population lives on \$1.25 or less per day (a standard metric for impoverishment).<sup>902</sup> Official unemployment figures of 3 per cent are not credible; international agencies estimate real unemployment to be closer to 40-50 per cent.<sup>903</sup>

Poverty is consistently cited as a major challenge and potential security threat for Tajikistan.<sup>904</sup> Not only does it provide a pool of recruits for criminal and terrorist networks and extremist movements, but it strains the functioning of state institutions and makes it difficult for the central government to fulfil its security functions. As noted by Phil Williams, Tajikistan – like other Central Asian republics – is a country 'in which many of the needs of citizens are not met by government or by business, and where there is considerable capacity for alienation and subsequently violence in an attempt to improve conditions'.<sup>905</sup> Poverty also contributes to poor education and falling literacy levels, which are seen by Tajiks as a driver of criminality and extremist movements. Amongst people who remember the Soviet era, when poverty was cushioned by the comprehensive provision of social goods and basic needs, the relative poverty and inequality in Tajik society today generates a strong sense of grievance.<sup>906</sup>

The human security implications of the economic crisis can be seen in the country's rising crime rates. According to the Tajik government, the total number of crimes committed in the country fell from around 16,000 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2006 – but then steadily rose after 2009,

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<sup>900</sup> Akiner (2001), 61.

<sup>901</sup> IMF 2011 World Economic Outlook, accessed 1/3/12 at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodata/index.aspx>. World Bank, Tajikistan Country Brief, accessed 2/4/12 at: <http://www.worldbank.org/tj>.

<sup>902</sup> World Bank Development Research Group, accessed 1/3/12 at: <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SI.POV.DDAY> and <http://www.indexmundi.com/tajikistan/percentage-of-population-below-national-poverty-line.html>

<sup>903</sup> IOM (2012), 13; ICG (2009), 11.

<sup>904</sup> Akiner (2001), 76-77; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 21, 29.

<sup>905</sup> Williams (2003), 74. See also Torjesen, et al. (2005), 55.

<sup>906</sup> Wiegmann (2009), 46.

up to 17,000 in 2011.<sup>907</sup> The increase has been attributed to improved reporting of crimes as well as the economic downturn and lower levels of remittances from Tajik labour migrants in Russia.<sup>908</sup> (In 2011, 86 per cent of drug crimes, for example, were committed by unemployed people.<sup>909</sup>) Thus, under broader definitions of security threats that include criminal predation of the population, Tajikistan faces a rising threat from criminality.

In many ways, Tajikistan has outsourced its social services function in a manner similar to the way in which it has outsourced its security function to Russia and the United States.

International aid agencies and NGOs play a significant role in providing and improving basic goods and services to Tajik citizens, including food, health care, housing, education, water, agricultural assistance and many other fundamental needs. Whilst this relieves the responsibilities of the Tajik state, in the long term it contributes to the continued influence of local and informal systems of governance, at the expense of the central government's authority and legitimacy.<sup>910</sup> Thus, the mechanisms for addressing poverty in Tajikistan are inadvertently undermining the long-term functionality of the state.

Finally, a key economic activity feeding into Tajikistan's security challenges is the cotton industry, which features high levels of corruption and the callous exploitation of rural Tajik labourers (including women and children). This continuing state of affairs inhibits Tajik economic development, drives the out-migration of the male labour force, and creates serious grievances that facilitate the spread of extremist movements.<sup>911</sup>

In sum, there are a number of trends and conditions at the societal level that are of great concern to Tajiks as potential drivers of conflict and victimisation. Despite this, surveys show that Tajiks are thus far relatively complacent as to their overall opinion of the state of their nation. This apparent paradox can be explained, in part, by civilian victimisation, as discussed in the following section.

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<sup>907</sup> Figures rounded. Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 5.

<sup>908</sup> Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 5; US Department of State (2010); Central Asia Online, 12/10/09.

<sup>909</sup> Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan (2012), 6.

<sup>910</sup> For a good discussion of these dynamics, see Wiegmann (2009).

<sup>911</sup> ICG (2005); Wiegmann (2009), 76; Interview (UN-Tajikistan), Dushanbe, 2008.



## **7.4 Conclusion: Did Civilian Victimization During the Civil War Drive Postwar Security Threats?**

The central finding to emerge from this discussion of the postwar era is that the role of civilian victimisation as a driver of security threats fundamentally depends on which interpretation of 'security threat' is being utilised.

If one takes the traditional view that security threats are those emanating from states and external sources, it appears that civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war had little impact on postwar security challenges. The one exception is Uzbekistan, who became noticeably more hostile toward the Tajik regime after Kulyabi attacks on and exclusion of the Uzbek community within Tajikistan.<sup>912</sup>

However, under an expanded universe of security threats that includes non-state actors, civilian victimisation begins to acquire more relevance. I argue there are three ways in which civilian victimisation during the civil war may have contributed to the formation of postwar security threats at the non-state level.

First, a key factor in civilian loyalty to sub-state actors in the postwar era is the dynamics of protection and revenge associated with attacks on civilians during the war. In eastern Tajikistan, a large measure of the authority and legitimacy that local warlords maintained after the war stemmed from their role as protectors of local constituencies – a role made necessary only because of the indiscriminate violence deployed against the Gharimi and Pamiri populations.<sup>913</sup> At the same time, the enduring trauma of the war and the losses that were suffered at the hands of the current regime, in combination with local norms of blood feud and revenge, encourage loyalty to local authority figures at the expense of the central government.

As noted earlier, the continued existence of local warlords in eastern Tajikistan remains an ongoing security threat to the regime. It is difficult to say whether such figures would command local loyalty even if civilian victimisation had not occurred at such levels during the war, but given that most grievances against the regime are rooted in relatively recent victimisation and maltreatment – as opposed to, say, longstanding historical enmity or centuries of conflict – I argue that enduring sub-state loyalties and their attendant diminution of state authority in eastern Tajikistan have been significantly increased by the civilian victimisation perpetrated by the PFT and the Kulyabis during the war.

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<sup>912</sup> Akiner (2001), 78; Atkin (1997b), 298-300; Bleuer (2007), 24-25.

<sup>913</sup> Roche and Heathershaw (2010b).

Second, in examining the current dynamics of the narcotics trade and other non-state threats, it appears that the large refugee flows generated during the war contributed to the development of illicit flows in the postwar era in several ways. Some of the key routes used by narco-traffickers and militants were first established by refugees fleeing into Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan.<sup>914</sup> In the refugee camps of northern Afghanistan, Tajik refugees made connections with Afghan trafficking networks.<sup>915</sup> Many of the Tajik drug couriers, in the early years after the war, were former refugees who continued to suffer economically and turned to the drugs trade for support.

In short, the massive dislocation of civilians during the war facilitated the long-term growth of criminal and militant networks by opening up new logistical possibilities and providing a large pool of recruits. Indeed, according to one UNODC expert in Dushanbe, the primary long-term consequence of the Tajik civil war and its associated refugee flows was the creation of the organised narco-trafficking networks seen today.<sup>916</sup> Whilst it is possible that transit routes could have been established without refugee input, and a large pool of recruits may have existed anyway due to poverty levels in Tajikistan, this connection between refugee populations and the development of trafficking networks is a frequently overlooked element that deserves greater attention.

Third, as noted earlier, it has been suggested that one of the key reasons for the appeal of HT in Tajikistan is that a traumatised population is attracted to an ideology of change without violence. Thus, it could be theorised that civilian victimisation during the war is now contributing to HT recruitment. If true, this would be a significant finding, given the degree to which the Tajik regime considers HT a current security threat. However, there is not enough data to conclusively support this theory, and the relatively low levels of HT membership in Tajikistan (lower even than in Uzbekistan, which did not experience a civil war) further diminish confidence in the primacy of this factor.

In sum, I argue that civilian victimisation during the war contributed – albeit to varying degrees – to some of the key non-state threats in the postwar era: warlords, narco-trafficking and (possibly) extremist movements. Civilian victimisation facilitated ideational dispositions and logistical expertise that such non-state actors could draw upon after the war.

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<sup>914</sup> Cornell (2005b), 630; ICG (2001b), 2; Madi (2004), 260.

<sup>915</sup> Interview (OSCE-Tajikistan), London, 2009; Paoli, et al. (2007), 958; *Moscow News*, 17/9/93; What the Papers Say/*Pravda*, 20/6/97.

<sup>916</sup> Interview (UNODC), Dushanbe, 2008.

Finally, civilian victimisation has arguably had a significant impact within the final category of threats – internal/societal. The death and displacement of thousands of civilians directly created conditions of poverty and insecurity for a large segment of the population in the postwar era, conditions which are generally seen by Tajiks today as the drivers of extremism, criminality and militancy.<sup>917</sup> Ethnic cleansing and continued discrimination drove thousands of Gharmis and Pamiris to leave the country in search of work, creating an enduring and likely unsustainable migrant labour challenge. Systems of predation that were formed during the war – such as the abuses committed by new Kulyabi security forces against Gharmis and Pamiris – became the basis for entrenched corruption and criminality within the Tajik security services. Finally, the psychological legacy of civilian victimisation and the continued physical and material suffering within the population create a latent pool of socioeconomic grievances, one which may be exploited more successfully by militant or extremist groups in the years to come.

This argument, however, relies upon an interpretation of threat in which poverty and other socioeconomic conditions may be considered security threats due to their role as drivers of more conventional threats like terrorism and political violence. It is an interpretation well supported by the literature on the political economy of conflict – and even by earlier events in Tajikistan. After all, whilst there were multiple drivers of the Tajik civil war, one key ingredient in its outbreak was the poverty and inequality amongst regions which engendered serious political and socioeconomic grievances. If one accepts this view of the causes of the civil war, it becomes difficult to argue that poverty and inequality in the postwar era should not be considered potential security threats.

In sum, I argue that civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war facilitated the following long-term strategic outcomes:

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<sup>917</sup> Akiner (2001), 76-77; Abdullaev and Frasier (2003), 21, 29; OSCE (2009).

| <b>Table 7.3. Long-Term Strategic Outcomes of Civilian Victimisation</b> |                                                                  |                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>External</b>                                                          | <b>Non-State</b>                                                 | <b>Internal/Societal</b>                                                              |
| Increased hostility from Uzbekistan                                      | Increased sub-state loyalties                                    | Increased socioeconomic grievances, leading to potential unrest/extremist recruitment |
|                                                                          | Facilitated transit routes and recruitment for narco-trafficking | Corruption of security sector                                                         |
|                                                                          | Enhanced appeal of non-violent Islamist extremists (possibly)    | Migrant labour 'timebomb'                                                             |

This extended discussion of the security threats facing contemporary Tajikistan raises the question of whether Tajikistan could once again fall into conflict or be subject to state collapse – a question that is continually debated amongst Central Asia observers. The consistently gloomy prognoses offered by, for example, the International Crisis Group are countered by the apparent solidity of the Rahmon regime and of the networks of political-criminal connections that suffuse the country's political and economic spheres. This state of affairs contradicts the conventional view that weak, impoverished and authoritarian states cannot maintain stability for long periods, but fits nicely into emerging debates on the nature of the state, sub-state governance, and whether state failure is a viable concept.<sup>918</sup>

I argue that Tajikistan is not a failing state, but rather a quite successful criminal state. By the standards of Western democracies it fails its citizens and seriously risks its long-term viability, but viewed from the perspective of the corrupt and criminal actors that dominate it, it has proven a rather successful vehicle for the pursuit of personal wealth. The open question is how long this scenario might continue, and whether any number of severe shocks – the death of Rahmon, the return of migrant labourers, another Taliban takeover in Kabul – could be absorbed by the criminalised state structures or would instead destroy the functioning of the central state. (It should be noted, however, that unlike in 1992 the Tajik state now possesses functioning – if massively corrupt – security forces, which means any renewal of conflict would evolve along much different paths than in the civil war.<sup>919</sup>)

<sup>918</sup> Heathershaw (2011); Menkhaus (2010).

<sup>919</sup> Akiner (2001), 88.

One key element in the current stability in Tajikistan is the complacency of its people with respect to the Rahmon regime. Public opinion polls reveal that Rahmon still enjoys popular support and faces few political challenges.<sup>920</sup> A number of factors could account for this; the most often cited is ‘war weariness’ amongst the population and their belief that a strong central leader will forestall the re-emergence of conflict.<sup>921</sup> In the context of what they have endured in the last twenty years, this is not necessarily an irrational choice, especially as it also offers something people consistently prioritise: predictability. A key (if often overlooked) factor in a population’s tolerance of suboptimal conditions is their preference for predictability and order, especially when recent history reveals the potential costs of political change.<sup>922</sup> The 2010 IFES survey revealed that 68 per cent of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with the current situation in Tajikistan; 55 per cent of that cohort gave a reason of ‘peace and no war’ whilst 34 per cent offered ‘situation is not very good but can live’ as a reasoning.<sup>923</sup> The OSCE field surveys found that in Dushanbe, ‘For many, high levels of corruption, a low standard of living, and few opportunities for work are bearable as long as the conditions that were present during the civil war are never replicated’.<sup>924</sup> It is important to note, however, that the regime has encouraged and exploited such anti-war sentiments over the years for its own political benefit (in other words, whilst ‘war weariness’ is a genuine emotional trend, it is also a political phenomenon mediated by the regime).<sup>925</sup>

The centrality of ‘war weariness’ in future threat assessments is intriguing, because in many ways it is a euphemistic proxy for civilian victimisation. The antipathy of the Tajik population toward war is deeply rooted in the massive civilian suffering that attended their civil war, when a million people were driven from their homes, tens of thousands were killed, wounded and raped, and most of the country lived through years of anarchy and poverty. In the end, then, the most significant result of civilian victimisation during the civil war may be its central role in the popular rejection of renewed conflict – and thus acceptance of a repressive yet stable regime. In a sense, victimisation has thus created numerous negative long-term security effects whilst at the same time producing a large positive security effect in terms of mitigating the likelihood of renewed conflict.

<sup>920</sup> IFES (2010); IFES (2004); IWPR, 4/10/10; ICG (2009), 2.

<sup>921</sup> Akiner (2001); Abdullaev and Barnes (2001); IOM (2012); ICG (2009), 1; IWPR, 31/7/09; Interview (NDI), Bishkek, 2008.

<sup>922</sup> On predictability, see Menkhaus (2010), 178. This phenomenon is also captured in the concept of a population preferring a ‘negative peace’, in which physical violence has ceased but structural violence remains. Promulgated by Galtung (1969), this is discussed in the context of Tajikistan in Heathershaw (2011), 5.

<sup>923</sup> IFES (2010), 6.

<sup>924</sup> OSCE (2009), 12.

<sup>925</sup> Interviews, Dushanbe, 2008.

However, no one can be certain how long this 'war weariness' will last. An entire generation that has no firsthand experience of the war is now approaching the age group in which political opposition and violence is most common. Political or economic shocks may also serve to overcome lingering traumas. At the present time, there is no reason to think that Tajikistan is in imminent danger of collapse or renewed conflict, but it continues to possess a large number of latent conflict triggers that must be carefully monitored.<sup>926</sup>

In sum, it is clear that civilian victimisation during the Tajik civil war has had lingering effects on the security of Tajikistan to the present day. The next chapter concludes this dissertation by considering the implications of this and other analytical insights for our understanding of the character of modern conflict.

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<sup>926</sup> Abdullaev and Frasier (2003).

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: KEY FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is a matter of constant debate as to whether the social sciences generally and rationalist analysis specifically can illuminate even the darkest and most brutal aspects of human behaviour in warfare. Can models and theories truly explain why individuals slip the bonds of their peacetime inhibitions and commit appalling acts of violence upon helpless civilians? Can five-step processes really capture the mechanics of revenge, greed and power that seemingly drive mass murder and displacement? Or are such transgressions actually beyond the remit of scholarly discourse and evaluation?

In this dissertation, I argue that whilst we may never fully understand the reasonings of individual perpetrators, a combination of strategic and constructivist analysis, applied to case study evidence, yields a number of group-level findings applicable to non-state-actor victimisation during the Tajik war – and possibly a wider universe of conflicts as well. In this chapter, I aggregate these findings and provide conclusive answers to the central research question posed in Chapter 1: *how and why did the Popular Front of Tajikistan engage in civilian victimisation, and what were the strategic effects in the near and long term?* After addressing the findings relevant to the Tajik case, I then propose four additional findings related to the broader study of civilian victimisation by non-state forces. I conclude the chapter with a consideration of how these findings fit into the current state of research as well as promising avenues for future research given the conclusions reached herein.

#### 8.1 Key Findings: The PFT and Civilian Victimisation

In this dissertation, I have examined in depth the strategic behaviour of the PFT and the consequences of its use of victimisation for the strategic outcomes of the conflict as well as longer-term strategic challenges for the state. Utilising the strategic approach, and considering in turn how and why the PFT victimised civilians as well as the evident effects in the short and long term, I have arrived at four key findings that – taken together – serve to answer the dissertation's central research question.

##### The PFT victimised civilians primarily via targeted violence, displacement and criminality

In answer to the question of *how the PFT victimised civilians*, my construction and evaluation of a strategic history of the civil war lead me to conclude that there were three primary

mechanisms of civilian victimisation on the part of the PFT: targeted violence, displacement and criminality. In the first year of the war, PFT militias victimised civilians during attacks on kolkhozy and population centres, culminating in a frenzy of ethnic cleansing following the fall of Dushanbe. After being incorporated into government structures, PFT members continued to victimise Gharms and Pamiris during military operations and through their construction and perpetuation of criminal networks and corrupt official agencies and security forces. Displacement peaked during the first year of the war but continued at lower levels during Phase II as well.

These categories of victimisation were largely a function of the PFT's strategic aims in combination with its capacity and capabilities. This is illustrated by considering the types of attacks that *did not* occur – for example, an attempt at the wholesale slaughter of the Gharmsi population, which was neither necessary for the PFT to achieve its aims nor possible given its relatively small size. Forced labour, a form of victimisation seen in other conflicts, was not a significant issue as the PFT did not control productive industries requiring large inputs of labour. Abuse of civilians by the police forces during Phase II of the conflict was significant, but usually did not extend to mass murder, as it was more profitable to keep civilians alive and paying bribes and ransoms. In short, the finding that certain types of victimisation occurred and not others helps to establish a scope of PFT victimisation – and once the limits of its victimisation can be discerned, it becomes possible to consider the question of *why* such victimisation occurred.

PFT victimisation was a rationalist strategy based upon the strength and weakness of normative, strategic and criminal incentives

Having established the types and limits of PFT victimisation, the question of *why the PFT victimised civilians* can be addressed. My application of a multivariate incentives model to the PFT case study reveals that the normative, strategic and criminal incentives for victimisation were strong, and all but two of the corresponding incentives for restraint were weak (and further, that those two non-weak incentives were overridden by the incentives for victimisation). Thus, the PFT perceived victimisation as an attractive strategic choice for achieving its strategic aims as well as criminal and personal needs, and was able to construct normative mechanisms in order to override societal taboos.

This is a significant finding because it illustrates the fact that victimisation occurred in Tajikistan not just because there were strong incentives in favour of it, but because the incentives for restraint that are theoretically possible in every intrastate conflict scenario were



extremely weak in this case. Thus, PFT victimisation was not solely the result of its own internal aims but of a broader strategic environment that failed to offer constraining factors (such as a strong state actor or pervasive legal norms) upon its behaviour. This recognition of the role of the strategic environment in victimisation – one of the benefits of utilising the strategic approach – remains relatively rare, despite its explanatory value.

#### Civilian victimisation led to successful conflict outcomes for the PFT

PFT victimisation contributed to a range of conflict dynamics: it polarised conflict actors, enabled militia-based warfare and the dispersion of violence, facilitated the acquisition of territory and resources, escalated the conflict at key junctures and complicated conflict resolution efforts. Overall, however, the most significant finding is that victimisation led to successful conflict outcomes for the PFT, both in winning the first phase of the war and in consolidating power and personal wealth during Phase II. There were very few aspects in which victimisation proved counterproductive, and these were significantly outweighed by the benefits.

This finding is significant because it departs from both theory and case study derived from other intrastate conflicts, which generally depict victimisation by non-state forces as counterproductive – if not in the short term, at least in the long term. I suggest that PFT success may be attributable to two key factors. First, its adversary during the first phase of the conflict was not a strong state actor, but another non-state force – and one which also engaged in civilian victimisation. This mitigated the legitimacy effects that traditionally doom brutal non-state groups, and the fact that each actor had a more or less captive constituency also meant that protection dynamics could come into play. Second, the PFT was somewhat unusual amongst non-state forces in actually taking over the reins of power. Having captured Dushanbe and installed its then-puppet ruler, the PFT was in a position to embed itself within the government and enjoy all the perks of participation in a massively corrupt politico-economic system. The surprising stability of this corrupt authoritarianism means that even fifteen years down the line, victimisation cannot be considered counterproductive *for PFT factions* (if not for Tajikistan as a whole). This is an important finding for the consideration of the utility of victimisation for non-state forces.

#### Civilian victimisation led to negative long-term strategic effects, with one significant positive effect

Tajikistan faces an impressive array of security challenges in the postwar era. Depending on the locus of threat perception – whether one focuses on state-level, non-state or societal

threats – the impact of civilian victimisation ranges from rather low to very significant. I argue that given a holistic interpretation of the pre-war factors that generated the civil war, it is necessary and also more accurate to consider the broad range of non-state and human security threats facing Tajikistan, in which case one must conclude that victimisation has had a large impact. It has facilitated sub-state loyalties, criminal logistics and corrupt systems, and most importantly generated significant levels of impoverishment and depredation that fuel many of the current security challenges (including terrorism, extremism, out-migration and economic crisis).

This finding, whilst interesting in its linkage between overall threat perception and victimisation impact, is nevertheless not entirely unpredictable. It echoes the experiences of many other post-conflict states, where the effects of mass victimisation complicate peace-building and reconstruction efforts. The more significant finding is that there appears to be one large positive effect of civilian victimisation: the sense of ‘war weariness’ and severe aversion to conflict that remains palpable within Tajik society. Despite the utter lack of reconciliation mechanisms, the continued authoritarian bent of the Rahmon regime, and severe levels of poverty and hardship, it is a virtual article of faith within Tajikistan that war cannot be allowed to resume, for the consequences would be too disastrous. Whilst there is no telling how long this sensibility might endure, it is notable for having lasted at least fifteen years already. This places Tajikistan apart from many other conflict states and leaves it thus far outside the ‘conflict trap’ mechanism (in which post-conflict conditions set the stage for future conflict).

In sum, the central findings from the Tajik case study are: 1) The PFT victimised civilians primarily via targeted violence, displacement and criminality; 2) PFT victimisation of civilians was a rationalist strategy given an incentives structure in which the normative, strategic and criminal incentives for victimisation were strong and the corresponding incentives for restraint were weak; 3) Civilian victimisation led to successful conflict outcomes for the PFT; 4) Civilian victimisation led to negative long-term strategic effects for the Tajik state, but with one significant positive effect in the form of postwar popular rejection of the renewal of conflict. Taken together, these findings serve to answer the central research question posed by this dissertation.

## **8.2 Proposed Findings for the Study of Civilian Victimisation**

This dissertation aims to contribute not only to analysis of the Tajik civil war, but to our understanding of the dynamics and effects of civilian victimisation by non-state actors more

generally. Based upon the Tajik case study, I would like to propose four possible findings that could significantly enhance evaluation of non-state-actor victimisation in other intrastate conflicts.

It is analytically possible and advantageous to include criminality within categories of victimisation

The distinction between political and criminal actors in conflict states is increasingly acknowledged to be an analytical convenience rather than a reflection of reality. As new models and approaches emerge that account for the essential hybridity of non-state actor motivations and activities in modern conflicts, it seems logical enough to expand notions of victimisation to include criminal predation and violence against civilians. Whilst criminality is often considered as a sort of backdrop to victimisation – part of the overwhelming fabric of misery within which civilian populations are embedded – this dissertation demonstrates the utility of bringing criminality to the foreground of victimisation analysis. It helps to provide a much fuller accounting of the costs borne by civilians as well as the range of instrumental incentives that non-state actors possess.

A multivariate incentives model provides a rigorous appraisal of non-state-actor targeting behaviour in war

Thorough engagement with the theoretical and empirical literature enabled the construction of a multivariate incentives model, which I applied to the Tajik case study with useful effect. I argue that it captures not only the essential dichotomy within targeting choices – victimisation vs. restraint – but the full array of influences upon a non-state actor's perceptions of the optimal strategic choice. Whilst it is impossible to ascertain here whether this model is generalisable to the analysis of other non-state conflict actors, based upon my own immersion in the literature on intrastate war I see few obstacles to utilising the model in this way.

| <b>Table 8.1. Non-State Actor Incentives Model: Restraint vs. Victimisation</b> |                      |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Category of Incentives</b>                                                   | <b>Binary Choice</b> | <b>Main Variables</b>                                                                                        |
| Normative                                                                       | Restraint            | International humanitarian law<br>NSA Codes of Conduct<br>Societal norms                                     |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Norm-stretching<br>Demonisation<br>Defensive threat perceptions<br>Blood feud traditions<br>Utopian ideology |
| Strategic                                                                       | Restraint            | Legitimacy<br>Strategic discourse effects<br>Sustaining resources                                            |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Soft targets<br>Prolonging conflict<br>Passivity of civilians<br>Territory and resource acquisition          |
| Criminal                                                                        | Restraint            | Protection function<br>Economic inputs                                                                       |
|                                                                                 | Victimisation        | Asset acquisition<br>Status and control                                                                      |

It is possible for victimisation to serve as a successful strategic choice for non-state forces in intrastate war

As noted above, civilian victimisation proved an ultimately successful strategy for the PFT, most likely due to several unique conditions of the conflict. It does raise the possibility, however, that non-state forces in intrastate wars might engage in victimisation and succeed – something that is rarely acknowledged in current thinking on insurgency and civil war outcomes. I have seen firsthand, in consultations with British and American counterinsurgency practitioners, the allure of the belief that insurgents are doomed to fail if they brutalise civilians. Whilst still a very likely outcome, the experience of the PFT should be kept in mind when analysing the future potential of other groups engaged in victimisation, such as the Taliban and various Al Qaeda militias around the world.

It is possible to isolate and evaluate the long-term strategic effects of victimisation in warfare

I argue that this dissertation demonstrates that the strategic approach can and should be extended to consider the long-term effects of victimisation. First, the continuity between conflict and post-conflict conditions allows for this kind of extended analysis. If we reject the overly prescriptive view of conflicts as being neatly broken up into pre-conflict, conflict, and

post-conflict phases, and focus on the ways in which conflict environments are transformed rather than ended, it becomes possible to continue strategic analysis for some set time after the formal end of conflict.<sup>927</sup>

Second, there is analytical value in extending the timeframe under consideration. It allows for a broader and more accurate accounting of the true costs of civilian targeting in warfare, whilst also revealing the degree to which contemporary security problems have their roots not just in 'the war' but in specific aspects of the way it was conducted. Imagine, for a moment, that the Tajik civil war had been conducted solely by small forces of armed men, with virtually no damage to the civilian population. Would we expect to see the same level and kind of security threats visible in Tajikistan today? Would Tajikistan still be so impoverished, corrupt and criminalised, vulnerable to attacks and collapse? Perhaps because modern warfare so often includes mass levels of civilian victimisation, these sorts of long-term effects are easily blamed on conflict itself – but as this case study shows, it is specific aspects of the conduct of modern warfare that generate significant long-term costs.

Third, it is analytically feasible to consider the effects of civilian victimisation in the postwar era as the *long-term strategic outcomes* of civilian victimisation. Whilst it should be emphasised that causality cannot be emphatically proven across such a long time period, especially considering the multitude of factors that affect each of the variables considered here, it remains logical within the confines of the strategic approach to refer to the postwar effects of a strategic decision (in this case, targeting) as strategic outcomes. The change in the strategic environment from an official state of war to an official state of peace is of negligible impact considering the continuity of actors and overall security conditions.

In sum, I propose the following findings with respect to the study of civilian victimisation as a whole: 1) It is analytically possible and advantageous to include criminality within categories of victimisation; 2) A multivariate incentives model provides a rigorous appraisal of non-state-actor targeting behaviour in war; 3) It is possible for victimisation to serve as a successful strategic choice in intrastate war; 4) It is possible to isolate and evaluate the long-term strategic effects of victimisation in warfare.

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<sup>927</sup> On the continuum of violence and the artificiality of pre- and post-conflict determinations, see Keen (2008); Cramer (2006).

### **8.3 Implications for Current and Future Research**

These findings are intended to contribute to ongoing research efforts to expand our understanding of how and why non-state armed forces victimise civilians in warfare. As noted in Chapter 1, much of the research dedicated to civilian victimisation focuses on state actors, or on aspects of non-state forces (such as culture) that I argue are not analytically productive in isolation. Thus, it is my hope that the findings and research frameworks contained within this dissertation might demonstrate that innovative approaches to this complex issue can yield additional empirical evidence as well as new hypotheses. In short, I believe this dissertation sits comfortably within current academic research – as it draws upon existing methodologies from within strategic studies, the political economy of conflict, and constructivism – whilst also creating new analytical stepping stones for the further examination of both the Tajik conflict and non-state-actor victimisation.

Several areas of future research suggest themselves. Within Tajik studies, there remains the need for a full-length treatment of the events of the civil war as well as additional case studies of other conflict actors. Just as the strategic history and various typologies provided within this dissertation represent an additional layer of knowledge with respect to the Tajik war, I hope that future research will build upon this empirical content with further micro-level investigations of actors and conflict dynamics. Further, within Central Asian studies, there remains a need for more analysis of the impact of large refugee populations on security challenges. As shown in Chapter 4, displaced populations can become key strategic actors in their own right; given the ongoing dislocation of civilians and potentially large new flows in the coming years, this aspect of the intersection between victimisation and security requires more attention.

With regard to war studies generally, there is a critical need for improved understanding of how criminality and illicit flows affect not just the initiation but the conduct of warfare, especially with respect to treatment of the civilian population. To the extent that criminality is considered within the context of warfare, it is all too often limited to evaluation of the ways in which crime funds war-fighting. The strategic choices of criminal militias and the impact of criminal incentives on targeting choices are seriously under-theorised, within both academic and policy communities, largely due to artificial analytical distinctions between criminal and political actors and dynamics. This state of affairs is gradually improving, however, as new approaches for incorporating criminal variables in conflict analysis gain traction.

Finally, it should be remembered that an improved understanding of the drivers and effects of civilian victimisation might serve a higher purpose: namely, a better understanding of the ways in which victimisation might be reduced. A further benefit of utilising an incentives model is that it helps illustrate potential pressure points where incentives might be adjusted and thus potentially reduce the appeal of victimisation as a war-fighting strategy.<sup>928</sup> For example, civil society initiatives can help halt dangerous norm-stretching mechanisms; better understanding of the strategic discourse of victimisation can help avert escalation and retaliation; foreign interventions can provide sufficient security and policing to reduce criminal predation. Further research may demonstrate that applying the multivariate incentives model to specific conflict actors does in fact reveal larger and more nuanced preference structures than are currently considered, and thus improved access points for efforts to adjust their perceptions and behaviour.

In conclusion, the purpose in investigating the dynamics and effects of non-state-actor victimisation is not limited to improved understanding, but includes the hope that new research approaches may yield insights and mechanisms to better counter and mitigate its occurrence. It is my hope that the Tajik case study and expanded analysis contained within this dissertation will contribute to additional research on non-state-actor victimisation as well as new strategies for inducing restraint amongst conflict actors in modern intrastate wars.

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<sup>928</sup> Keen (2000), 25.

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